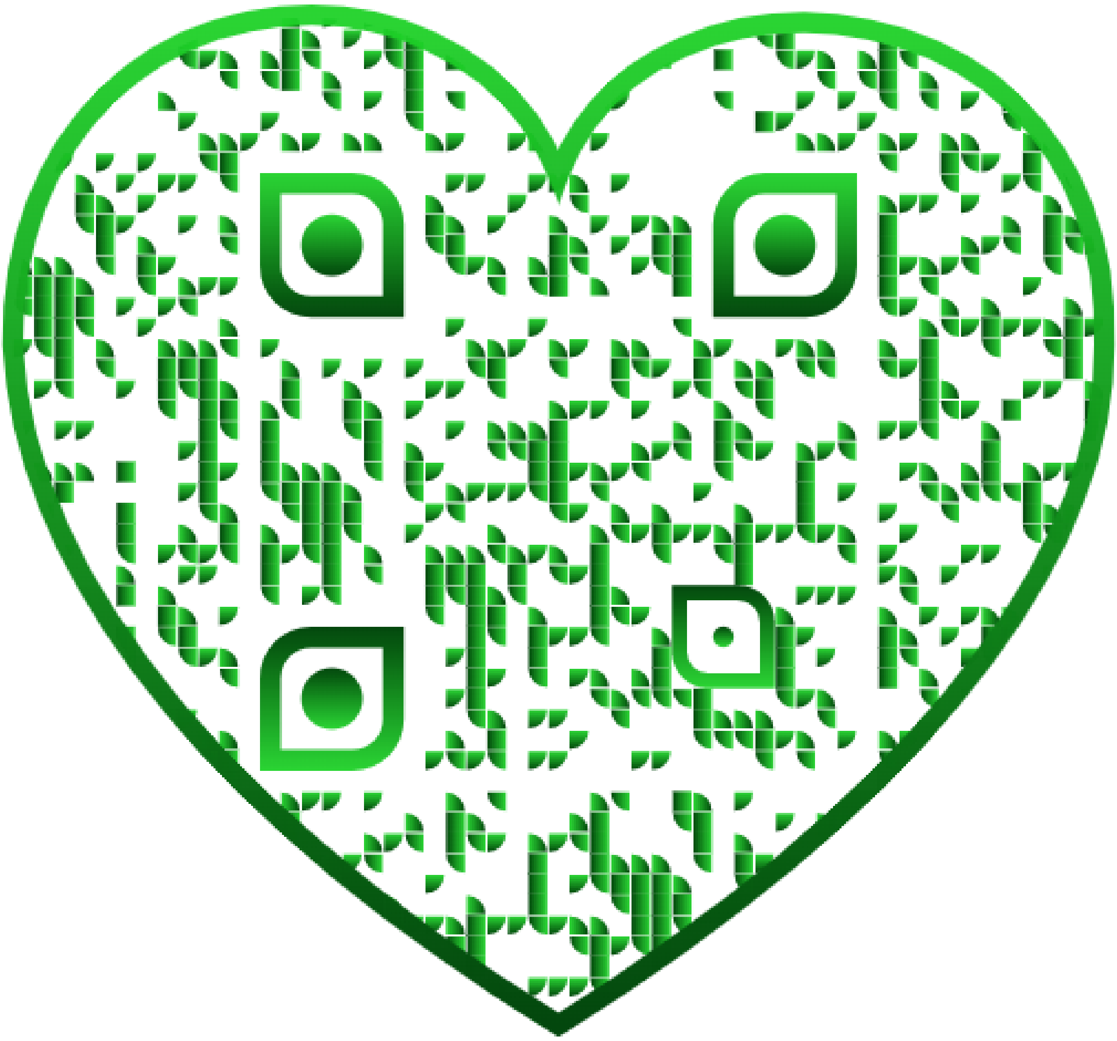
BRITISH TRAVEL JOURNAL

STORIES TO INSPIRE THE BRITISH ISLES

ISSN 2631-9225
9 772631 922020 02
£6.95

WILD SWIMMING | ARTISAN FOOD | FARM RETREATS | LUXURY STAYS



TRESCO ISLAND

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Tresco: 28 miles off the Cornish coast. *Somewhere else altogether.*

WELCOME

Get ready, because something exciting is blossoming this summer with the rise of a new wave of British farm stays – a chance to reconnect with nature and experience the countryside in a truly authentic way. Louma, a brand new farm retreat in Dorset (p54), and Fowlescombe Farm, a 16th century regenerative farm in South Devon (p86), where the land itself is the main attraction and the wild inhabitants are as important as the guests, are just two examples.

And it's not just farms doing things differently. We're shining the spotlight on Yorkshire's brand new wellness destination, Saltmoore (p80), East Sussex's recently unveiled, The Alfriston (p36), and Scotland's first ever floating sauna – where you can dive headfirst into the tranquil waters of Loch Tay – part of our wild swims in luxury resorts roundup (p65). After bracing the cold water, raise the temperature with Britain's wild sauna movement, blending outdoor adventure with hot-cold therapy (p76).

We're also seeing a delightful trend in picture-perfect pubs. Our feature, Room at the Inn (p42), isn't just about charming rooms and great food; it's about finding adventure on the doorstep – from gardening at the Eden Project and venturing through the Vineyards of the Surrey Hills, to joining Alex Polizzi for walks of the stunning South Downs countryside.

Finally, don't miss your chance to win a stay at Edinburgh's spectacular hotel, The Witchery – we're offering the chance to win a one-night stay with atmospheric dining (p24). Wherever the season takes you, we hope this edition of *British Travel Journal* fills you with inspiration to explore our beautiful British Isles. ◆

Jessica

Jessica Way, Editor-in-Chief

BRAMLEY
BRAMLEY
BODY WASH

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Cover Image: Karolina Wiercigroch visits Wildhive Callow Hall, Peak District (p28).
Contributions: Amy Bonifas, Sophie Farrah, Emma Henderson, Jane Knight, Natalie Millar-Partridge, Kirstie Pickering, Rebecca Pitcairn, Karolina Wiercigroch,
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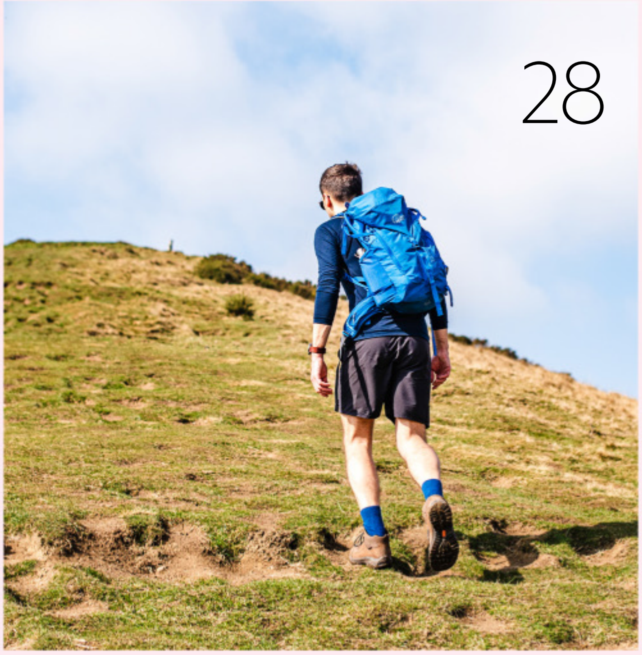

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42 ROOM AT THE INN
Picture-perfect pubs are having a moment – from rooms with historic intrigue, packed with character to well-stocked bars and seasonal suppers, with gentle jaunts and hefty hikes on the doorstep – discover those to stay in with unforgettable experiences nearby.

54 CREATURE COMFORTS
Celebrate rural luxury at a brand new 'farm retreat'. Set within the Dorset countryside, Louma offers an immersive experience where the land and its wild inhabitants sit at the heart.

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Still like to prioritise fitness whilst on holiday? Browse our edit of stylish fitness finds, whether you're hitting the hotel gym for fun new workouts, making use of the tennis courts or pool, or trying out a yoga or pilates class.

65 DIVE IN FOR OUTDOOR SWEATS AND COLD DIPS
From wild swimming in the Lakes to floating in natural ponds and braving the open waters from a private jetty, *British Travel Journal* reveals the ultimate luxury retreats perfect for a refreshing wild swimming break.

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76 HEAT WAVE

Blending outdoor adventure with hot-cold therapy, Britain's wild sauna movement is gaining momentum. We list ten tried-and-tested spots to have on your radar if you're looking to raise the temperature this summer.

80 WHERE THE MOORS MEET THE SEA

Take time out with a nature-inspired stay at Yorkshire's brand-new wellness destination Saltmoore, nestled within an expanse of local landscape and idyllically positioned between the wild North Sea and the heather-clad North Yorkshire Moors.

86 A SLICE OF FARM LIFE

British Travel Journal takes a trip to 16th century Fowlescombe Farm in South Devon to discover how it's been brought back to life. With 450 acres of organic and regenerative farm, it's the newest countryside bolthole to have on your radar.

92 WHERE HAPPINESS IS A PLACE

The Gallivant is a chic seaside hotel, making waves in Sussex with its brand new restaurant, Harry's, showcasing a hearty and homely menu, brimming with seasonality. *British Travel Journal* checks in to find out more.

98 CLUES AND REVIEWS

Wherever you're set to travel this summer, make sure you while away sun-drenched hours with our latest book recommendations and crossword.

Plus don't miss...

24 COMPETITION TIME!

British Travel Journal has teamed up with The Witchery – Edinburgh's popular destination-hotel with spectacular atmospheric dining – to offer a luxurious one-night stay, including breakfast and a three-course dinner for two.

79 SUBSCRIBE TO THE JOURNAL

Fuel your wanderlust with an annual subscription to *British Travel Journal* plus treat yourself to a delightful Bramley discovery body gift set, all for only £20 – while stocks last!

From Capital to Countryside, experience the best Scotland has to offer with *Gleneagles.*
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TRAVEL NEWS
Summer

The lazy, hazy days of summer bring with them some great new places to stay, along with beach festivals, new walking trails and sparkling wine tastings

Text by Jane Knight

SEASONAL HIGHLIGHT

HOTELS

from page 8

EVENTS & EXPERIENCES

from page 12

GLAMPING

from page 18

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from page 20

Pictured anticlockwise from top: Penmaenuchaf, Snowdonia; Ardbeg House, The Hebrides; Wild on the Beach, North Cornwall Trerethern Farm, Cornwall; Penicuik House, Midlothian

NORTH COTSWOLDS

Hyll

It's all about art and the countryside at this hilltop hotel, set to open this summer in a 17th century manor house and its outbuildings near Charingworth, Chipping Campden. Contemporary sculptures are dotted around the 60-acre estate, which commands panoramic views across the Cotswolds. The surrounding landscape inspired the design in the 26 rooms. ◆

→ Rates yet to be set; hyllhotel.com

ONE TO
watch

LONDON

The July

If you're after a London base that's less formal than a hotel but offers more than an apartment, take a look at The July. Whether you want a studio or an apartment for six, the 114 Art Deco-inspired units all come with kitchens, housekeeping services, and the use of a gym, sauna, all-day restaurant, deli and bar. Victoria station is a five-minute walk away. ◆

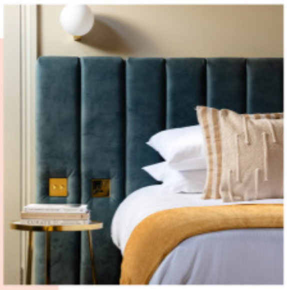
→ Rooms from £249, without breakfast; thejuly.com

SOMERSET

The Rooms

Chef Merlin Labron-Johnson has already made a name for himself with his Michelin-starred cuisine at Osip in a historic inn near Bruton. Now he's added four pared-back rooms with exposed beams, neutral tones and oak floors and headboards. Two of the rooms are duplex, with freestanding tubs. Guests will be welcomed with Osip's own cider and refreshments. ◆

→ Rooms from £300, with breakfast; osiprestaurant.com



LANCASTER

Domain Boutique Rooms

For a stylish stay within walking distance of Lancaster's castle and cathedral, check out this seven-room boutique hotel in a Georgian townhouse. Some of the contemporary cool rooms feature bold colours, with the best one under the eaves. There's no reception – guests check in digitally – and breakfast is served nearby.

→ Rooms from £153, with breakfast; domainboutiquestays.com

NORTH WALES

The Bryntirion Inn

Book a room at luxury country house hotel Palé Hall on the edge of Snowdonia and you won't get much change from £300. But the hotel has just opened a six-room gastropub on its estate, with much lower rates. The 17th century inn comes with the usual original stone walls and beams plus an added extra of classic car and motorsport memorabilia. Simply styled rooms are each named after a Welsh mountain, with corresponding photography inside. ◆

→ Rooms from £140, with breakfast; thebryntirion.co.uk

CLEVELAND
DAIMLER
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SNOWDONIA

Penmaenuchaf

At the foot of Cadair Idris and overlooking Mawddach Estuary in the Snowdonia National Park, this mountain retreat is slowly being refurbished. Two years after the first phase of restoration, phase two has brought Nicola Harding's striking designs to five additional bedrooms and created a new lounge bar with mahogany panelling and red velvet seating. ◆

→ Rooms from £230, with breakfast; penmaenuchaf.co.uk

NORTHERN IRELAND

Dunluce Lodge

For the ultimate golfers' getaway, stay on the edge of the fourth fairway of the Royal Portrush Golf Course, which this July hosts The Open. This recently opened hotel comes with its own onsite putting green as well as 35 quietly elegant rooms and a spa to relax weary muscles after hours spent out on the course. ◆

→ Rooms from £345, with breakfast; dunlucelodge.com

CORNWALL

Bodmin Jail Hotel

Really live the prison experience by checking in as a prisoner, warder or governor at this former 18th century jail. The new packages all include an overnight stay plus entry to the Bodmin Jail Museum, a guided history tour, and evening ghost tour. 'Prisoners' eat dinner at long tables from basic trays, 'warders' have a more elevated supper and 'governors' enjoy a seven-course banquet and private tours. ◆

→ Rooms with dinner and breakfast from £315 (prisoners); £382 (warders); £651 (governors); bodminjailhotel.com

ONE TO *watch*

LONDON

The Newman

A very grown-up experience is promised at this hotel when it finally flings open its doors this summer. With an Art Deco aesthetic in the 81 rooms, European all-day brasserie, underground cocktail bar and even a wellness floor with hot and cold experience cabins, a salt therapy room, hydro pool, gym, and meditation space.

→ Rates yet to be set; thenewman.com

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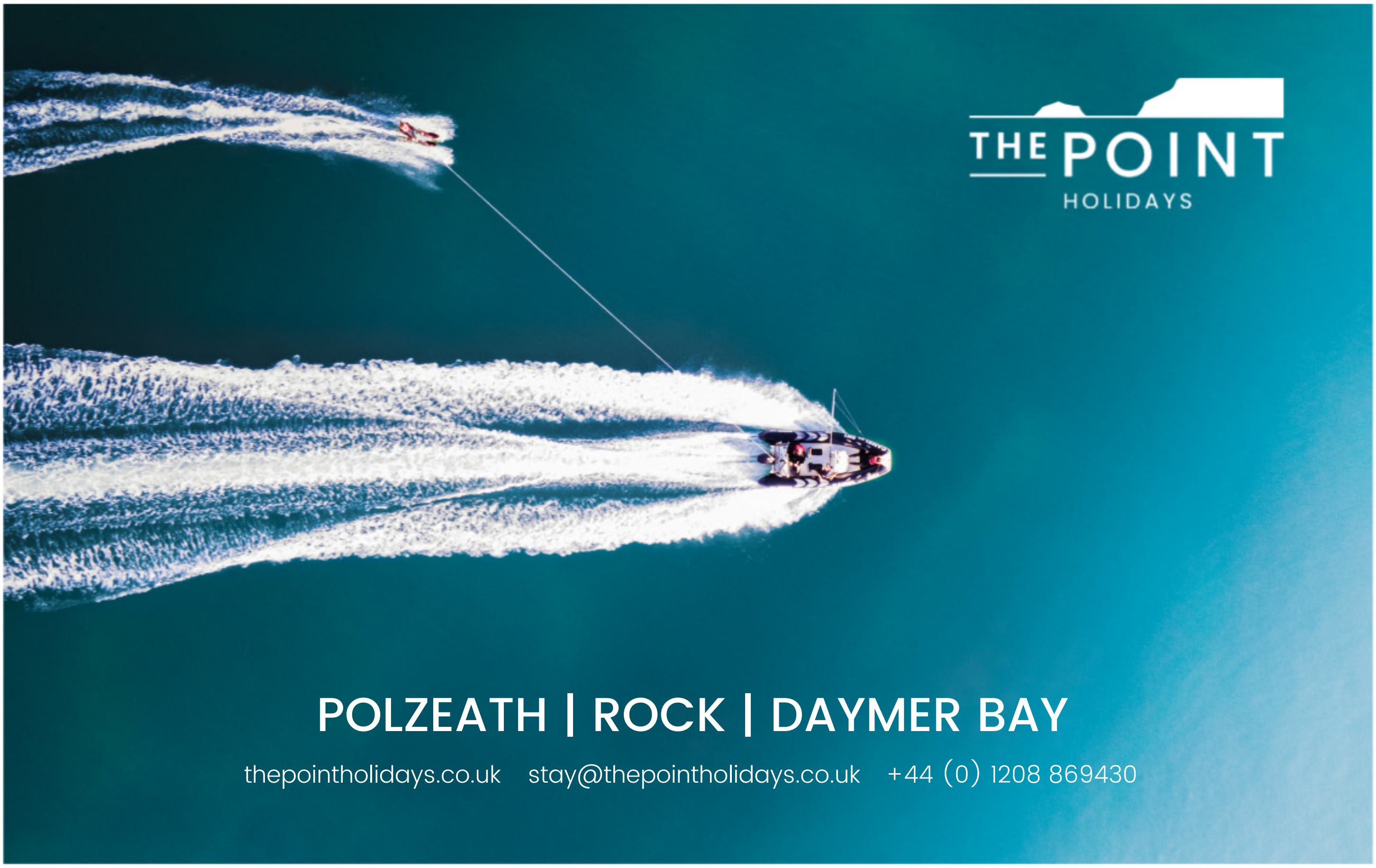

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THE BRITISH ISLES

Great British train journeys

Take a scenic rail journey that starts and finishes with a stay in a sustainable, wellness-focused hotel near London's Paddington station following a partnership between travel company Byway and Inhabit Hotels. One UK itinerary heads north to Scotland while the other includes the sleeper train to Cornwall, two nights at St Ives and two nights in Padstow. ◆

→ Seven nights from £1,370pp on the Cornwall itinerary; byway.travel

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COUNTY DURHAM

Kynren outdoor show

It's hard to believe it's the tenth anniversary of this show with mass choreography on magnificent sets, plus added pyrotechnics and equestrian feats. If you haven't yet seen Kynren – an Epic Tale of England in Bishop Auckland – this is the year to do so, with an expanded show from the 1,000-strong cast. The season runs from July 19-September 13. ◆

→ £30 for adults, £20 for under 18s; kynren.com

NORTH CORNWALL

Wild on the Beach

If you're in Cornwall on July 5 and 6, head to Watergate Bay to see the hit show WILD from the dance-circus company Motionhouse. Set against sea and sand, the free show has acrobats swinging and soaring from a series of tall poles, with aerial twists, throws and leaps of faith. On Saturday July 5 there will also be a silent disco and evening street food. ◆

→ The 45-minute free shows run several times on both days; watergatebay.co.uk/events

JERSEY

Michelin-star spitfire experience

Take to the skies over Jersey in a spitfire (with a pilot), do a victory roll and then return to celebrate with a meal in the Michelin-starred restaurant at The Club Hotel & Spa in St Helier. The four-night escape includes a 30-minute flight, available July 17-19, and one dinner, with plenty of time to explore the island.

→ Four nights for two from £4,948, with breakfast; theclubjersey.com

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KENT

Domaine Evremond sparkling wine

It's been a decade since Champagne Taittinger bought the land for its 151-acre vineyard in Kent, but now its first classic cuvée can be tasted at its new winery in Chilham. Comprising the classic champagne grapes of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier, the English sparkling wine is derived from vines planted in 2017. The name comes from Frenchman Charles de Saint-Evremond who fuelled the popularity of champagne at Charles II's court. ◆

→ Tasting £25pp, tours and tasting £60pp, Wednesday-Saturday; domaineevremond.com

DOMAINE
EVREMOND

NORTHERN IRELAND

Lucian Freud's Etchings

A temporary exhibition of Lucian Freud's etchings is being shown at Titanic Belfast this summer, in partnership with the V&A museum. The immersive exhibition includes a re-creation of the artist's Kensington studio, digital projections, more than 60 etchings from his life's work, and pods where you can hear interviews with key figures in his life. ◆

→ Until September 30, free admission; titanicbelfast.com

ISLE OF WIGHT

The Dickens walking trail

Follow an interactive 6.3-mile trail in honour of Charles Dickens, who stayed on the island in 1849, and scan QR codes en route to hear the author's words. Starting at Shanklin, the walk heads across the Downs to the Victorian seaside resort of Ventnor. The trail ends in Bonchurch, which was possibly the home of the real Miss Haversham in Great Expectations. ◆

→ More details on visitisleofwight.co.uk

ARGYLL

Oyster tours

Discover how the Caledonian Oyster Company cultivates the bivalves in Loch Creran on Scotland's west coast. Judith Vajk, aka the 'Oyster Lady', gives one-hour tours, then teaches visitors how to shuck an oyster before they sample an oyster flight with three different toppings. More seafood is on offer at the nearby Pierhouse Hotel in Port Appin. ◆

→ One-hour tours £42; pierhousehotel.co.uk

BERKSHIRE

Beekeeping at Monkey Island

Enjoy a summer stay on this private-island estate on the River Thames and you can book a 90-minute tour of the beehives and discover the art of harvesting honey with beekeeper Sergio. Guests can also book self-drive river boats for up to six people. The 40-room hotel is set in the 18th century fishing retreat created for the third Duke of Marlborough. ◆

→ Beekeeping £240 for two, boat hire £100 an hour; monkeyislandestate.co.uk

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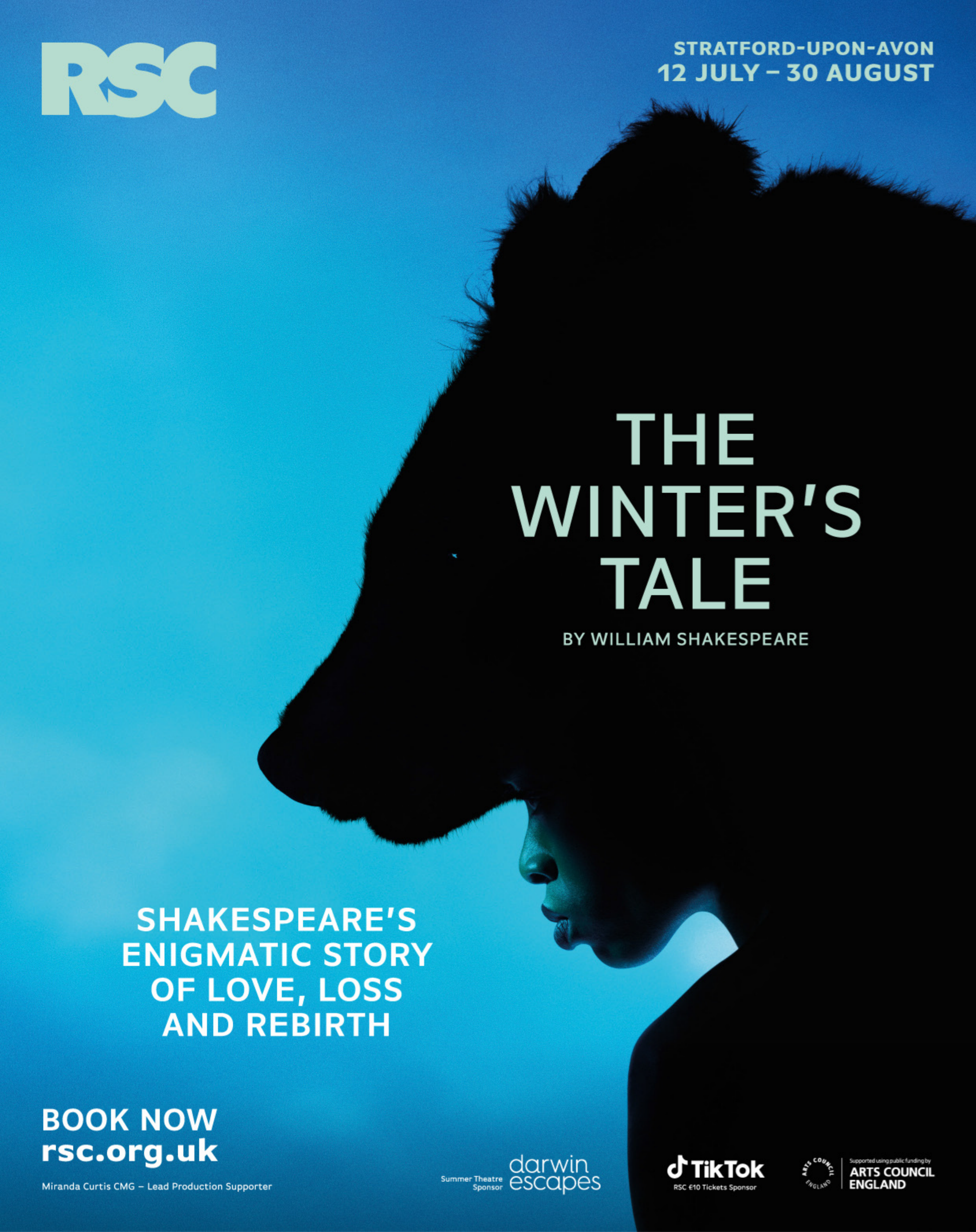

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HADESTOWN
lyric theatre

Enjoy the record-breaking sensation where a song can change your fate

The acclaimed Broadway musical and winner of eight Tony Awards including Best Musical and the Grammy Award for Best Musical Theatre Album, written by singer-songwriter Anaïs Mitchell, blends American songwriting traditions from indie folk, to pop, blues, and New Orleans-inspired jazz. *Hadestown* takes you on an unforgettable journey to the underworld and back, intertwining two mythic love stories – that of young dreamers Orpheus and Eurydice, and that of King Hades and his wife Persephone. A deeply resonant and defiantly hopeful theatrical experience, Hadestown invites you to imagine how the world could be. The West End production is currently playing to audiences in the Lyric Theatre, on Shaftesbury Avenue. ◆

HOW TO BOOK TICKETS

Hadestown is currently booking through to February 2026, with the best availability on mid-week performances.

→ Tickets priced from £20. To book, call the Lyric Theatre Box Office on 0330 333 4812 or visit *uk.hadestown.com*

WELSH MARCHES

Hergest Lee Cabins

Cabin stays don't have to mean roughing it: this cedar-clad duo near Kington have been beautifully crafted. First up, The Cabin has a curved silhouette, a roll-top bath looking out to the Black Mountains, a king-size bed and mezzanine sleeping area. The lean-to features a sunken bath and bunk area for kids. Both have fully equipped kitchens and bathrooms.

→ Two nights in either cabin for a family of four from £280; hergest-lee.com

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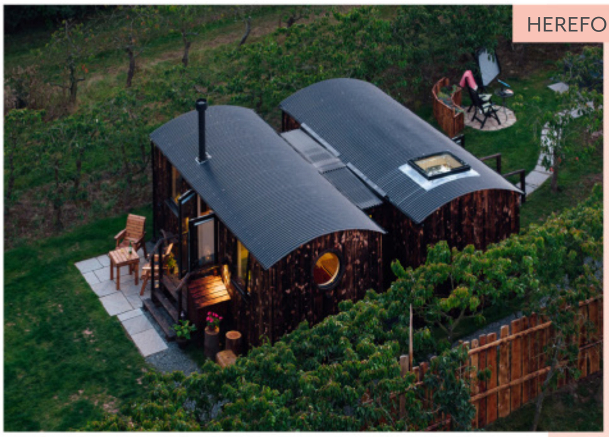

HEREFORDSHIRE

Orchard Escapes

Set in a cherry orchard, these two cabins near the market town of Leominster make perfect boltholes for couples. Each has a spa hot tub and BBQ pit with access to the tennis courts and use of mountain bikes for cider-tasting expeditions. A king-size bed is set beneath a stargazing skylight. And there's free cherry picking in July. Bliss.

→ Two nights for two from £398; orchardescapes.com

CORNWALL

Trerethern Farm

Views of the Camel Estuary are on show from the trio of new shepherds' huts here. Go swimming in the private creek, walk across the fields to Padstow 25 minutes away, and when you return, sip Camel Valley Brut while stargazing. You can also book a farm-to-fork feast at Padstow Kitchen Garden on the same site. Each hut has a double bed, kitchen, bathroom and BBQ.

→ A night for two from £150; padstowkitchengarden.co.uk

KENT

Spot House Farm

Gather the gang and take over the whole meadow at this off-grid exclusive-hire site in Orlestone Forest Nature Reserve. The four bell tents with beds, wood burners and cosy furnishings sleep a total of ten people. They share an outdoor field kitchen with a BBQ, a long-drop loo and an open-air shower. Romney Marsh is nearby.

→ Three nights for ten from £1,350; spothousefarm.co.uk

GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Warblers' Meadow

Immerse yourself in nature when staying at one of five shepherds' huts at WWT Slimbridge, a 100-acre wetland paradise on the River Severn estuary. There's no TV or Wi-Fi to distract you, so you can instead take guided nature walks, birdwatching tours or a canoeing trip. There are huts for couples, families, and one with a wheelchair-friendly ramp and wider doorway. All are beautifully done out with kitchenettes, bathrooms, and their own ponds. ◆

→ A night for two from £100; warblersmeadow.co.uk

NORTH YORKSHIRE

The Bon Bon

Like the idea of staying in the big outdoors but love your creature comforts? The Bon Bon is the most luxurious addition to Kip & Nook's plush glamping in the Darlington countryside, and comes with a walk-in wardrobe, king-size bed and large bathroom. Admire the view through the floor-to-ceiling window or soak it all up in the outdoor bathtub instead. ◆

→ A night for two from £325; kipandnook.com

THE LAKE DISTRICT

The Farmhouse at The Yan

A bistro with beds, The Yan at Broadrayne has added The Farmhouse to its collection of cottages and glamping pods. The 1620s Grade II house has been beautifully renovated, with a spacious, light kitchen and beamed lounge. It has panoramic views of the fells, and you can order a three-course meal delivered to your door. ◆

→ A night for five from £330; theyan.co.uk

The Yan
AT BROADRAYNE

ISLE OF SKYE

Selkie

Get toasty in the sauna as you gaze at sublime views of Loch Harport at this rural escape for four. The minimalist house blends into the surrounding hills, is powered by wind turbine and solar, and uses pure spring water. You can do sun salutations on the yoga deck as eagles and kestrels soar overhead, climb the peaks of Black Cuillin or kayak on the loch. ◆

→ A week for four from £2,150; uniquehomestays.co.uk

KENT

Guard's House at Leeds Castle

You can enjoy out-of-hours access to the grounds of Leeds Castle when you stay in one of its crop of holiday cottages, the latest of which to open is Guard's House. The former barrack room near the castle has been converted into a beautifully decorated three-bedroom bolthole, with its own garden and an electric car charging point.

→ Two nights for six from £952; leeds-castle.com

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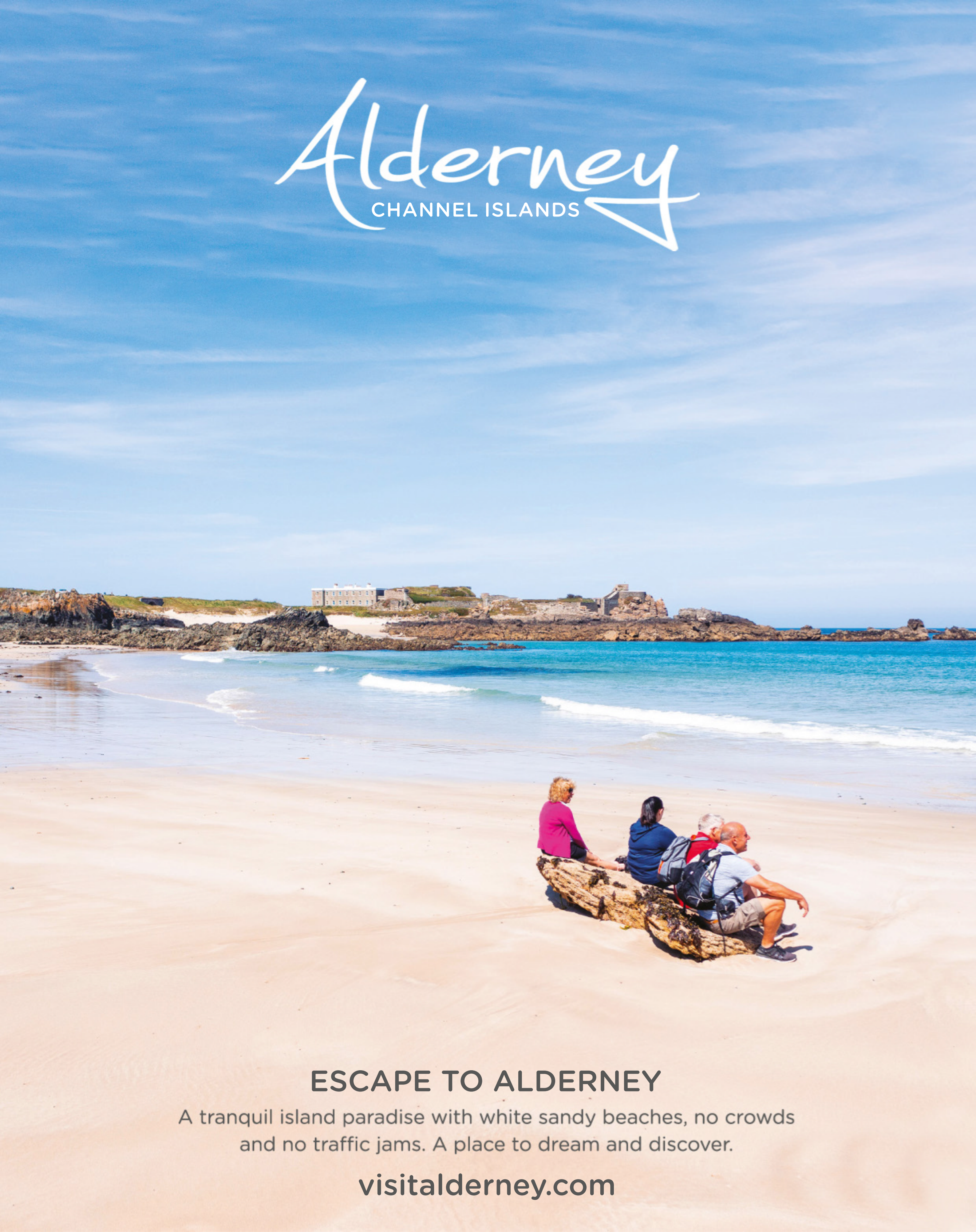

Alderney
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CORNWALL

Trevean on the Lizard

Use all the facilities at the family-friendly Polurrian on the Lizard hotel when you stay at its nearby four-bedroom house, opening in July. You even get an electric buggy to get around. Mind you, you may not want to leave Trevean, with its heated outdoor pool, hot tub and roof terrace with spectacular views of Mullion Cove.

→ A week for eight from £3,100; polurrianhotel.com

MIDLOTHIAN

Penicuik House

Make a milestone birthday really special at this 16-room Palladian house, which opens on the sprawling Penicuik Estate in August. Just 30 minutes from Edinburgh, the estate opened a collection of smaller cottages last year. The big house, in a 1770s stable block with its own clocktower, is overflowing with art and antiques. There's plenty to do, including private yoga, whisky tastings, 20km of walking trails, falconry and guided estate tours. ◆

→ A night for 32 from £9,750; penicuikestate.com

PERTHSHIRE

Silva

Settings don't come much more perfect than this modern hideaway's on the southern shorn of Loch Tay, with views of eight munros. Cleverly created from local stone with vast picture windows, the single-storey house has five bedrooms. Inside, it's all modern minimalism, while outside, red squirrels and deer frolic and the water and hills beckon. ◆

→ A week for eight from £3,250; uniquehomestays.co.uk

Win a luxury stay at
THE WITCHERY

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Win a luxury overnight stay · Scan to enter ·

British Travel Journal has teamed up with The Witchery, Edinburgh's most spectacular atmospheric dining and hotel destination, to offer the chance to win a luxurious one-night stay with breakfast, a three-course dinner for two with a bottle of house wine, plus a £40 voucher for its newly opened The Witchery Shop.

For nearly half a century, The Witchery has captivated visitors with its stunning décor, remarkable antiques, legendary cuisine, and award-winning wine list, firmly establishing itself as a beloved Edinburgh institution. Step inside to discover rich baroque splendour in the original oak-panelled dining room or the elegant, candle-lit Secret Garden, each adorned with captivating antiquities. Savour a delectable meal beneath the hand-painted ceiling or enjoy the exclusivity of the secluded terrace. Beyond exceptional dining, The Witchery boasts nine theatrical suites, each a unique masterpiece. The fabulously original chambers range from gothic glamour to breathtaking rooftop vistas. Regardless of which sanctuary guests choose, expect indulgence, luxury, and sumptuous roll-top baths designed for two.

→ Enter via our website britishtraveljournal.com/competitions. Last entries 31 August 2025. Over 18s only.

Photo: Chris Watt Photography
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FINGAL.CO.UK

MATILDA THE *Musical*

Inspired by the beloved book by Roald Dahl

IMAGES © MANUEL HARLAN

The multi-award-winning *Matilda the Musical* adapted from the much-loved Roald Dahl book has won over 100 international awards, including 24 for Best Musical.

With the musical's book by Dennis Kelly and original songs by Tim Minchin, Matilda The Musical is the story of an extraordinary little girl, armed with a vivid imagination and a sharp mind, who dares to take a stand and change her own destiny.

A tonic for audiences of all ages, this anarchic production continues Roald Dahl's theme of bravery and standing up for what you believe in, inspiring young audiences all over the world. Now the 15th longest running show in the West End, playing to audiences in the Cambridge Theatre on the corner of Earlham Street facing Seven Dials. Your visit to London this summer just isn't complete without a trip to experience Matilda The Musical.

HOW TO BOOK TICKETS

Matilda The Musical is taking bookings now, with excellent availability mid-week throughout the summer holidays. Tickets priced from £20.
Call 020 3925 2998 to book.

→ For the full performance schedule visit the website; matildathemusical.com

A rural retreat IN THE DERBYSHIRE *countryside*

Spanning over 35 acres of beautiful gardens, wild meadows and ancient woodland, Wildhive Callow Hall is a perfect gateway to the charming market towns and breathtaking hikes of the Peak District

Text and images by Karolina Wiercigroch

I finish the last creamy piece of Dovedale Blue and it's time for bed. We leave the clacking cutlery and pleasant chatter of the Garden Room behind and head out into the night. Strolling the twisty path into the woodland, we stop mid-stride to take in the starry sky. It's perfectly quiet, but for our rustling steps and soft owl hoots. The cosy lights of the imposing Callow Hall loom in the distance. Reaching the wooden door of our forest hideaway, I feel a whole world away.

I wake up to the sound of singing blackbirds and step out onto the wooden deck, ready to enjoy a cup of strong coffee amidst the spreading tree crowns. We're staying in one of the Hives – unique woodland bedrooms at Wildhive Callow Hall, an idyllic rural retreat in the heart of the Derbyshire countryside. Secluded and intimate, there are 11 Hives and two larger Treehouses spread around Callow Hall's verdant grounds, each named after the woodland flora. Ours, 'Rosebay', feels like a luxurious treehouse, finished in knotty timber, earthy tones and hand-stencilled Swedish folk art motifs. There's a very comfortable king-size bed, a chef's cupboard housing a mini kitchen, and a sleek bathroom stocked with 100 Acres botanical toiletries.

Inspired by the dreamy countryside, these British-made products smell like secret walled gardens and sunny orchards, infused with roman chamomile, sun-drenched rose geranium and sweet linden flowers.

‘The Derbyshire Breakfast is wonderfully local, from free-range eggs supplied by Sam’s Hens to scrumptious sausages from Owen Taylor & Sons – an award-winning Derbyshire family butcher, trading since 1922’

The main house, a recently-renovated Victorian Gothic stone-and-slate country manor, houses 15 unique bedrooms, each brimming with charm and character, beautifully designed – like the treehouses – by Isabella Worsley in her first solo project. The designer’s knack for combining textures and sourcing unique pieces is visible around the house, which hides numerous lounges, stylish snugs and relaxing nooks, perfect for curling up in. That morning, we take our breakfast in one of the lounges, drawn in by the soft armchairs and a crackling fire. The Derbyshire Breakfast is wonderfully local, from free-range eggs supplied by Sam’s Hens to scrumptious sausages from Owen Taylor & Sons – an award-winning Derbyshire family butcher, trading since 1922. Seasonal herbs and vegetables are grown in the hotel’s own kitchen garden and sourced from local farms. Fresh bread is delivered

daily from Loaf bakery in the picture-perfect village of Crich, right on the edge of the Peak District, and the breakfast granola is drizzled with sweet-scented honey from Wildhive's own apiary.

The appreciation for local ingredients shines through every page of the lunch and evening menus, crafted by Exec Chef David Bucowicki and Head Chef Tom Burton. Built around fresh local produce and influenced by David's extensive travels, the menu spans from Derbyshire lamb koftas to line-caught mackerel ceviche. Meals are served at the airy Garden Room Restaurant: this stunning glass-box structure was added during the 2021 refurbishment. The night before, we watched the warm evening sun through the glass walls while enjoying our starters.

My seabass had been cured in locally brewed Peak Ales IPA and served on a stack of handmade pikelets. A cross between pancakes and crumpets, pikelets have been produced and sold in Derbyshire for over a hundred years. I had a succulent Derbyshire lamb cutlet for my main course, which came with a Moroccan-spiced spare rib, Isle of Wight black garlic hummus and a dollop of lusciously thick mint yoghurt. My husband's sweet rhubarb pudding and bay leaf ice cream sparked a slight twinge of jealousy, but I'd been tempted by the British cheese menu. I particularly enjoyed the creamy Dovedale Blue, made by Mary Button of the nearby Staffordshire Cheese. Holding a PDO mark, this blue veined full fat soft cheese can only be made with milk sourced within 30 miles of Dovedale.

> *I wake up to the sound of singing blackbirds and step out onto the wooden deck, ready to enjoy a cup of strong coffee amidst the spreading tree crowns.*

Bloomers
BAKEWELL

Known for the clear river Dove and its impressive limestone ravines, the pristine Dovedale National Nature Reserve is just a short drive away from Wildhive Callow Hall. After breakfast, we set off on a hike, following the trickling stream to the famous stepping stones and then brave a steep incline for views of the sheep-dotted, verdant hills. Lunch is back at the Garden Room, where we enjoy some more local lamb. My tender Derbyshire lamb skewer is served with charred purple sprouting broccoli and pea guacamole, while my husband's pizza is topped with slices of pink Derbyshire lamb, paired with fresh mango, chilli honey and minted yoghurt.

We then drive to the charming market town of Bakewell, strolling along the River Wye between mellow-stoned buildings. But we're here to eat. Every business in town seems to be selling their own take on Bakewell's eponymous treats. Legend has it that the famous Bakewell Pudding – made with buttery puff pastry and soft almond custard – was created by mistake in the mid-19th century. Bakewell Tart, a much newer invention, features rich shortcrust, jam and frangipane, and is traditionally topped with fondant and a glacé cherry.

We try both at The Old Original Bakewell Pudding Shop, which sends its award-winning bakes around the world through a Post a Pudding service. In our private ranking, the Bakewell Pudding – sold from this very building since 1860 – comes in a very close second. We stock up on Bakewell Tarts, as well as some delicious local cheese. The Bakewell Cheese Shop has a great selection, including my now-favourite Dovedale Blue, as

well as tangy, crumbly Peakland White from Hartington Creamery, matured for just two weeks.

Positioned at the edge of the Peak District, Wildhive Callow Hall is a perfect base for avid hikers. The following morning, we embark on a hilly, 10-mile hike via Lose Hill and Mam Tor from the pretty Castleton village. The trip starts with idyllic scenes of the Derbyshire countryside and a soundtrack of bleating sheep and babbling brooks. The steep climb up Lose Hill rewards us with stunning sights, and the stone footpath along The Great Ridge offers some of the most spectacular views in the Peak District. For lunch, we settle into a sheltered spot on the Rushup Edge, watching paragliders drifting above Mam Tor and tucking into delicious baguettes, freshly filled to order at Peveril Stores, a small, family-owned bakery and deli in Castleton. Back at Callow Hall, we heat tired muscles in the sauna, located in the secluded stone courtyard of The Coach House.

On our last morning, we sit on the terrace, cups of coffee in hands, making plans for the day. We could start with a run, taking one of the winding paths straight from our Hive, and follow the River Dove from Mapleton to Thorpe. A quick sauna session, another delicious breakfast, maybe take a couple of the hotel's bikes and cycle the 13-mile Tissington Trail, stopping for toasted teacakes at Herbert's Tea Room. Is it bad that what I really feel like doing is to stay on this deck and look at the trees? ◆

→ *Stays in a Hive start from £296 per night, while a room in the main house is from £214 room only; wildhive.uk*

A *sparkling* STAY *in the* SOUTH DOWNS

A new boutique hotel has just opened in the East Sussex village of Alfriston, with its historic pubs, local fizz and country walks from the door

Text by Jane Knight

You won't go thirsty in Alfriston. The East Sussex village of just 830 souls counts no fewer than four pubs on its medieval high street. Add Rathfinny, the local sparkling wine estate, and you wonder how anyone ever manages a dry January.

Amid the pubs, there's not a chain store in sight on a street fringed with half-timbered and flint buildings, roofs charmingly askew and chimneys leaning like they've been at the booze. It's just galleries, tea rooms and independent shops. By the village green, St Andrew's Church, aka the Cathedral of the South Downs because of its size, stands sentinel by the thatched clergy house that was the National Trust's first acquisition back in 1896. The Cuckmere River curls its way along the valley just steps away. If there's a more perfectly packaged village, I've yet to find it.

Back in the Middle Ages, it was pilgrims on the trail from Battle Abbey to the shrine of St Richard at Chichester Cathedral who stopped here to rest their feet and to raise their glasses in the village inns. These days, it's hikers who seek succour after exploring the undulating South Downs that envelope the village.

Now there's a new place in town where they can stay, right down by the river, whose front door practically opens onto the South Downs Way.

Not that The Alfriston is exactly new. The building, whose bones go back to 1554, give or take a century or two of reconstruction, has been a hotel since the 1950s. Formerly Deans Place, it was ready for a fresh chapter, which is where new owners The Signet Collection stepped in. Founder Hector Ross has given it the same kind of makeover designed to offer affordable luxury in characterful surrounds that's

made hits of The Mitre at Hampton Court, The Retreat at Elcot Park in Berkshire, and The Barnsdale in Rutland.

And considering you can bag one of the 38 rooms here from £150 a night with breakfast, I'd say he's succeeded.

And very nice they are too: a cheerful mix of Signet's trademark pinks, teal and aqua, and fabric headboards that practically demand a nap. There are thoughtful extras, with complimentary cookies and a tipple of Madeira, as well as views – some rooms gaze over the Cuckmere, while others look onto the generous garden where guests can indulge in afternoon tea or a game of croquet. There's also an outdoor pool, with loungers made to linger, and a boutique spa to ease out any tense muscles after a day's walking.

But first, you need to hit the trail. I weigh up the options with James Dopson, who is full of local knowledge and whom Ross wisely kept on as manager. I relate that last time my son, Christian, and I were in Alfriston, we were nearly charged by

bulls on the way back from seeing the chalky enigma that is the Long Man of Wilmington carved into the slopes of Windover Hill.

He grins. "Yep, I've had that too. Just turn right out of the hotel and stick to the riverbanks; you'll be fine."

And we are. There are no bulls, just the gently named 'Kissing Gate Walk' and a scatter of walkers ambling through meadows. It's all sun, birdsong and big skies, and I'm tempted to carry on all the way to Cuckmere Haven, where the river meets the coast after wending its way over a ridiculously scenic flood plain. But Christian draws the line at a five-hour hike, so we detour back for the car and follow the winding lanes (past signs warning of 'toads in the road') to the sea, 20 minutes away.

There, we swap steps for paddles and kayak through the looping estuary, with swans gliding ahead and egrets stalking the shallows. It's peaceful, picturesque, and better still, completely bull-free.

Kissing Gate Walk
A 1½ hour riverside stroll (No Stiles)
Follow the waymarks to Litlington
Bridge and return on the other bank
Sussex Downs Area of
Outstanding Natural Beauty

Kayak returned, it's on to Birling Gap, where we take in the wind-whipped views stretching along the white curve of the Seven Sisters cliffs, climbing to Belle Tout Lighthouse for better views. The contrast of brilliant white chalk, green rolling downs, and endless sky makes it feel cinematic – wild, elemental, and utterly unforgettable.

By the time we return to The Alfriston, we're ready for some supper. Bypassing the bar, we bag a curved banquette in the bay window of the 1554 Brasserie that's a riot of pink and greens, and fall on the homemade focaccia. It's a precursor to an excellent meal. After Signet's signature cauliflower popcorn dressed in teriyaki, soy, chilli and sesame, I enjoy a generous skate wing with capers. Meanwhile, Christian tackles a rib-eyed steak with bone marrow and chips fat enough to double as doorstops.

Another morning, another walk. But first, an essential decision: which sandwich to pick up from the Village Stores, which looks like it's been preserved in aspic since the 1950s, complete with creaky floors and wooden counter. We squeeze in a quick wander round the village, too, comparing ourselves to literary greats on a height chart inside Much Ado Books (I'm well beyond Charlotte Bronte's 4'7 but way off Roald dahl's 6'6). Across the road, The Dressing Room offers vintage finds, including a 1930s black silk crepe gown I rather fancy until I see the £365 price tag. Just next door is what was once Britain's smallest bank, now long shut but still quietly proud of the title.

With sarnies secured and pockets bulging with sweets from The Alfriston's complimentary pantry (an inspired idea), we set off in search of culture in the countryside. Berwick Church is just over half an hour away, across fields that roll like waves over the chalk downs. From the outside, it's your classic flint-clad Sussex church. Step inside, though, and it's a different story: a riot of colour and creativity courtesy of Bloomsbury big-hitters Duncan Grant, Vanessa Bell and her son, Quentin Bell, who painted Biblical scenes using local villagers as models, with familiar Sussex hills in the background.

IMAGES: THE SEVEN SISTERS CHALK CLIFFS © SHUTTERSTOCK/JAMES RATCHFORD. ALFRISTON VILLAGE, LONG MAN OF WILMINGTON AND KISSING GATE © GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO. BIRLING GAP © CHRIS PARKER/EASTBOURNE BC

> *The place is a glorious time capsule, all hand-painted chairs, exuberant murals and intellectual clutter.*

Keep walking and you'll eventually stumble upon Charleston Farmhouse, where Grant and Bell once entertained the Bloomsbury set in suitably bohemian style (alternatively, for less enthusiastic hikers, it's a ten-minute drive from Alfriston). The place is a glorious time capsule, all hand-painted chairs, exuberant murals and intellectual clutter.

Back at The Alfriston, we celebrate our return with a glass of Rathfinny – Sussex fizz at its finest – alongside yet another excellent dinner. The bubbles are fresh, bright, and just the thing to inspire another outing: a visit to the vineyard itself.

Rathfinny is about a 40-minute leg stretcher from the village centre, with superb views over some of the 200 acres of rolling ranks of vines. At the other end awaits the Tasting Room, where you can linger over lunch or dinner on a terrace overlooking the vines, or, like us, head straight to the serious business of sampling. And yes, the blend of pinot noir, chardonnay and pinot meunier goes down very nicely, thank you.

This being Alfriston, it's not the only boozy hike on offer. It's an easy half-hour saunter from the hotel along the South Downs Way to Long Man Brewery, set on a regenerative, sustainable farm. Here, your efforts are rewarded with a flight of delicious ales for less than a tenner, and, if you time it right, a tour of the brewery too.

It's a pleasant thing to do in the early evening before returning to The Alfriston with a wobble in your step. As I said, you don't go thirsty in Alfriston – even the hikes come with a heady finish.

→ *Doubles cost from £150 a night, with breakfast; thealfriston.com*

The Star shines brighter in Alfriston...

It's a real village affair at The Star. When Olga and Alex Polizzi opened the hotel in 2021, they incorporated as much as possible of Alfriston into its very core.

The books by the bed and in the library come from Much Ado just down the road, the antiques from Diana Kelly Interiors nearby, and the striking floor stencil in the dining room is by Amanda Lawrence, who runs Objet Trouvé in Alfriston.

Items from her shop also pop up in the Forte Suite – the hotel's newest addition – with sculptures that wouldn't look out of place in a Bloomsbury salon.

Olga Polizzi has sprinkled her trademark polish over this suite, which looks over The Star's pretty courtyard. It's decorated with her favourite beech leafy green wallpaper, and the separate sitting room holds a velvet sofa, antique desk with a striking ceramic palm-tree lamp, plus a decanter of Seven Sisters gin on the sideboard. The vibe is curated but never contrived, with fresh flowers in the vase and Glyndebourne prints on the wall in a nod to The Star's proximity to the opera house.

There is a real sense of place everywhere in this hotel, whose atmospheric half-timbered pub was one of the resting places for passing pilgrims in the middle ages (there's even a sanctuary post in the bar). Take a closer look at some of the paintings and you'll see they are originals by Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell. There are nods to nature throughout, too, with hand-painted bird-themed lampshades hanging in the corridors, and even the handles on doors and cupboards shaped like tree branches. It's all very South Downs.

But as well as a sense of place, there's a sense of family here, which explains the name of the new suite. The hotel was once part of Trusthouse Forte, the hotel empire owned by Olga's father and Alex's grandfather. It's not just a village affair at The Star – it's a family one too.

→ *Rooms cost from £260, The Forte Suite from £470, both with breakfast; thepolizzicollection.com*

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ROOM *at the* INN

British Travel Journal **discovers picture-perfect pubs with beautiful bedrooms and awe-inspiring summer experiences not to be missed nearby**

Text by Sophie Farrah

1 BEST FOR HISTORIC STYLE

The Swan Inn, West Sussex

Nestled in the sleepy village of Fittleworth sits The Swan Inn, a quintessential village pub that has been recently transformed into one of Sussex's most stylish boltholes. Locally born restaurateur Angus Davies is the latest custodian of this 14th century coaching inn, which has undergone an extensive two-and-a-half-year renovation. Beneath wonky beams and slanting ceilings, interiors are an Insta-worthy mix of bold colours, pleasing patterns, fine art and antique furniture. There are 12 beautifully designed bedrooms in total, with luxuries such as roll-top baths and Verden toiletries. The pub's sophisticated, seasonal food is worth visiting for alone – think elevated classics and show-stopping sharers, all of which can be easily walked off on a nearby country ramble.

→ *Rooms start at £180 B&B; swaninnfittleworth.com*

While you're there...

Filled with charm and chocolate box views at every turn, the nearby market town of Petworth is steeped in history and is a lovely place to explore. Don't miss the National Trust's Petworth House and Park – a magnificent 17th century house, home to a staggering art collection, glorious gardens designed by 'Capability' Brown and a 700-acre deer park. This summer, for the first time in 20 years, the historic property is hosting 'Turner's Vision at Petworth' (21 June-16 Nov) – a specially curated selection of JMW Turner's rarely seen artistic studies of Petworth, exhibited in the very place that inspired him.

FISHCAKES £5.50
HAMHOCK CROQUETTE £6.50
TRUFFLE FRIES £4.50

2 BEST FOR ANIMAL ENCOUNTERS

The Bath Arms, Wiltshire

The Beckford Group own several lovely pubs with rooms and one of our favourites has to be The Bath Arms, which sits on the stunning Longleat Estate in Wiltshire. Established in 1736, this traditional yet stylish family-friendly inn has 16 simple yet chic bedrooms set within the pub and in a converted stable block. All feature soft cotton sheets, comforting interiors inspired by the British countryside, the pub's very own all-natural Bramley bathing products, and plenty of characterful features. Grab a pint with the locals at the cosy oak stool-lined bar, before heading into the candlelit dining room for some delicious, seasonal food. Outside, there's a spacious, sunny beer garden and a romantic terrace under the trees.

→ *Rooms start at £120 B&B; batharmsinn.com*

While you're there...

The Bath Arms is just a stone's throw from the magnificent Longleat House, home to the 8th Marquess and Marchioness of Bath, stunning formal gardens, and one of the most significant private collections in Britain. Guided tours take place most days. Also on the estate is the 120-species strong Longleat Safari Park, which is a fun-filled day out for all the family. The Bath Arms is so conveniently close to all the animal action that if you listen closely, you can actually hear Longleat's family of lively sea lions barking at breakfast, and its pack of wolves howling as dusk falls...

3 BEST FOR INSPIRING INTERIORS

The Manor House Inn, Somerset

The Manor House Inn is the latest opening from Chickpea, which owns a handful of pubs and pizza shops across South West England. The group specialises in creating a relaxed and friendly atmosphere, and simple, seasonal food. The Manor House Inn is no exception; it's a lovely rustic pub with plenty of nooks and cosy crannies, and lots of outside space, primed for the summer months. Sat in the heart of Ditcheat, the 16th century building was restored over a six-month period; flagstone floors, exposed beams and open fires have all been carefully preserved and sit alongside eclectic artwork, soft lighting and upholstered seating. Further original features can be found in the nine cosy en-suite bedrooms; book one of the two premium doubles which have lovely roll-top tubs and historic leaded windows.

→ *Rooms start at £130; manorhouseinnditcheat.co.uk*

While you're there...

The nearby horticultural utopia that is The Newt in Somerset is well worth a day trip; there are acres of splendid gardens, woodland, farmland and cyder orchards to explore, as well as a Roman Villa, gardening museum and more. The Creamery is The Newt's chic new café/restaurant at nearby Castle Cary station; it sits on the platform and is filled with nostalgic nods to the golden age of rail travel. In the garden, a beautifully restored Pullman carriage has recently been unveiled, where guests can book in for a sumptuous afternoon tea served in vintage style.

THE BULL'S HEAD
THE BULL'S HEAD

4 BEST FOR HEFTY HIKES

The Bull's Head, Herefordshire

The Bull's Head has been a Black Mountains landmark for many years. As one of the last remaining unspoiled drovers' inns in England, it's a place steeped in history, with all the characterful charm of a proper old local (think flagstone floors, slate walls and open fires). The pub is owned by Wild by Nature, a company with an ethos of growing and serving food naturally, so expect an unfussy, local ingredient-led 'farm to fork' menu rooted in the seasons, featuring meat and veg grown and reared by the pub. Outside lies a spacious beer garden overlooking the foothills of the Black Mountains, and the pub's four Scandi-style cabins, each of which contains a king-size bed, lounge area, kitchenette, bathroom and a lovely outdoor deck. There's also a wood-fired sauna for guests to use, perfect for soothing muscles after a long hike.

→ *Cabins start at £195, including a breakfast box; wildbynaturellp.com/the-bulls-head-inn*

While you're there...

One of the most beautiful and impressive walks in the Black Mountains starts in The Bull's Head's car park. Also known as the Cat's Back, The Black Hill route links on to the Offa's Dyke path, one of the Welsh National Trails on the border of England and Wales, and offers incredible views over the Olchon Valley and Golden Valley into Herefordshire and beyond. It's a moderate route that takes around three hours, and there's a well-deserved pint waiting on your return...

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be causing grief among
ellers in these Parts
ry of great violence
THIS COUNTRYSIDE FREE
ICH FIENDISH ROGUES
afe passage for all Travellers
THIS 15TH DAY of June 1728

5 BEST FOR EXPLORING THE LAKES

The Drunken Duck, Cumbria

This characterful old inn, restaurant and brewery can be found in Ambleside, in the heart of the Lake District. It has 11 comfortable, colourful bedrooms filled with vibrant artwork, patterned prints and sumptuous fabrics. Some are in a separate building at the back of the pub and have views over Black Crag, but for the full Duck experience, book room 2. This original room within the inn has views of the iconic crossroads in front of the pub, and a roll-top bath for soaking tired muscles after a long walk. The bar downstairs, filled with old pictures, antique furniture and dried hops, is always busy – as are the pub's picnic tables across the road, which have fantastic views over the surrounding fells. A sophisticated and substantial set menu is served in the pub's stylish restaurant but be warned – it gets booked up weeks in advance.

→ *Rooms start at £150 B&B; drunkenduckinn.co.uk*

While you're there...

Take to the water on nearby Lake Windermere. Located within the Lake District National Park, Windermere is the largest natural lake in England. It's a whopping 10.5 miles (17 km) long and one mile wide at its widest point. Ambleside Waterhead is less than a ten minute drive from The Drunken Duck: from here, you can take a picturesque boat trip on the lake, or even hire a self-drive boat and explore the water yourself.

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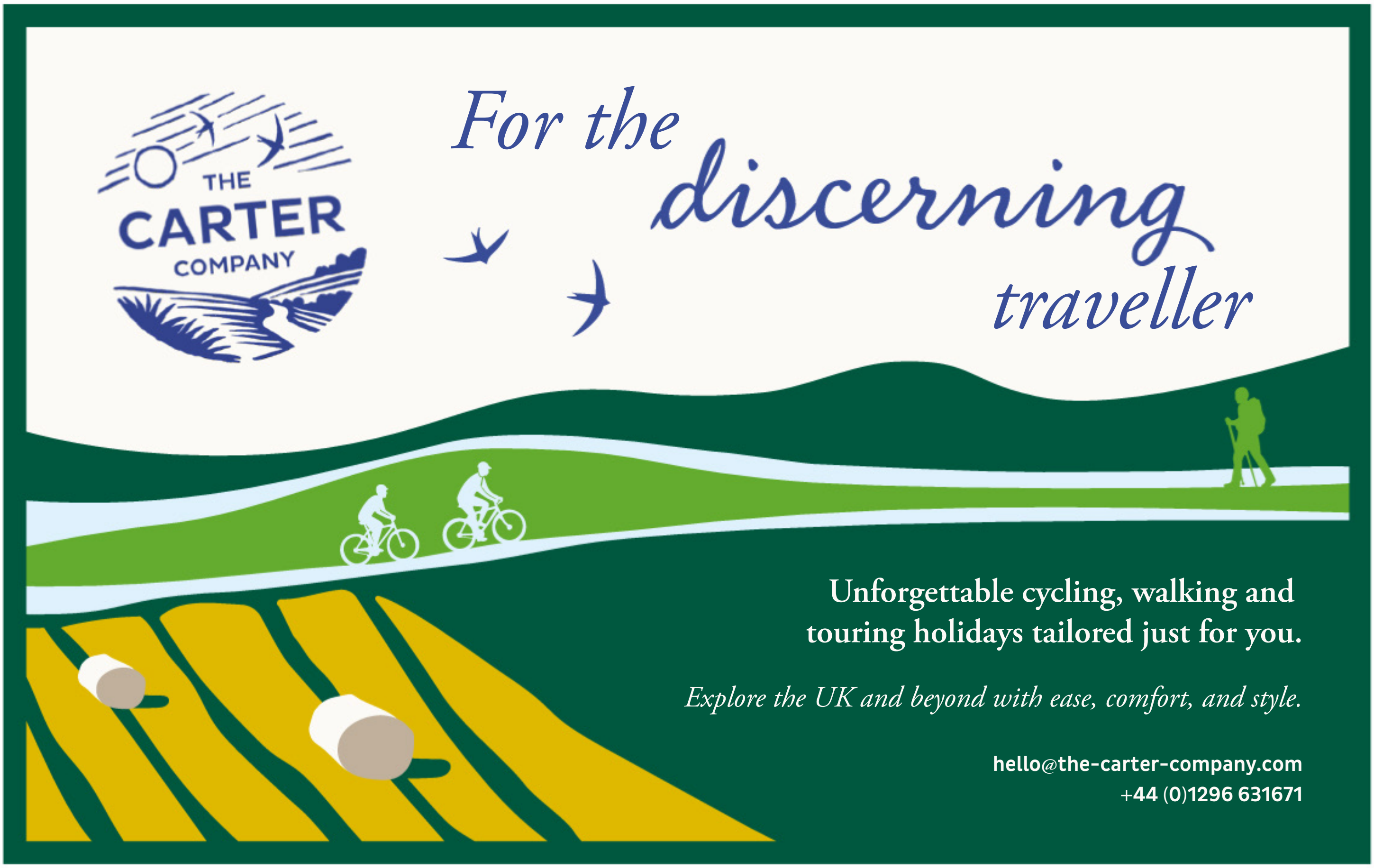

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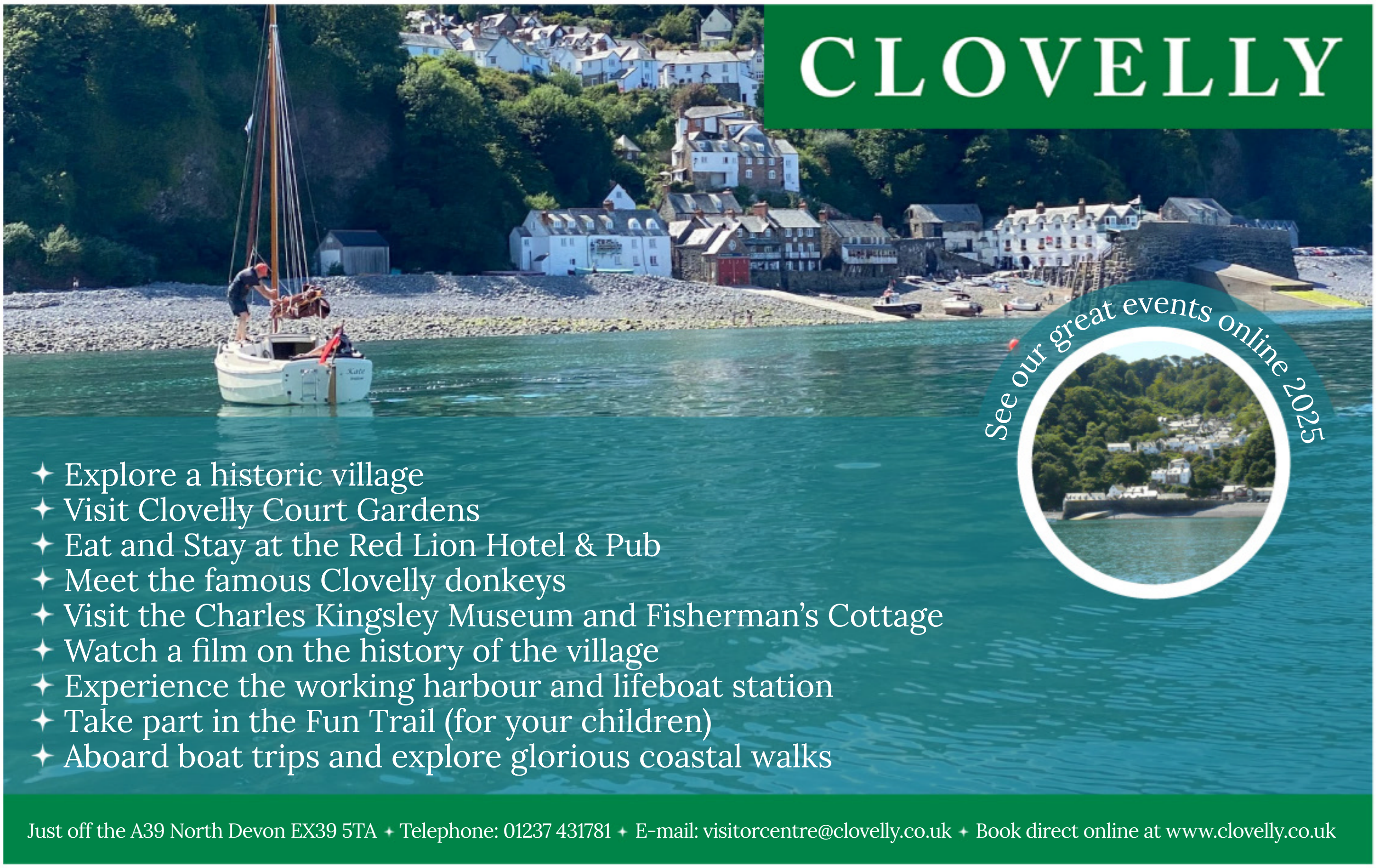

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6 BEST FOR CHARACTER

The Village Pub, Cotswolds

Nestled in the sleepy village of Barnsley, complete with honey-stoned cottages and rambling roses framing Farrow & Ball'd front doors, this cosy, characterful boozer is The PIG hotels' first ever pub. Creatively and sensitively restored and now known simply as 'The Village Pub', this Grade II listed 18th century gem has all the design-centric qualities and attention to detail that the PIG hotels are known for, combined with the appeal of a proper local that oozes country charm. Upstairs, six unique and luxuriously furnished bedrooms are similarly snug, whilst the food menu offers a sense of refined nostalgia – expect an ode to hearty pub grub made with excellent ingredients.

→ *Rooms start at £165 B&B; thevillagepub.co.uk*

While you're there...

Step into a storybook at Arlington Row. The quintessential honey-coloured Cotswold village of Bibury is less than 10 minutes from The Village Pub. Here, you'll find the fairytale-esque Arlington Row – a collection of 14th century weavers' cottages preserved by the National Trust – which offers a picturesque glimpse into England's past. It's a must-visit for photography enthusiasts and those seeking magical countryside charm. It's a popular tourist spot, so try to visit early in the morning for a more tranquil experience.

While you're there...

Just a ten minute drive from Charlestown, you'll find the world-famous Eden Project: a former clay pit that has been repurposed into a major eco-attraction filled with diverse plants and wildlife. From its iconic rainforest and Mediterranean biomes to beautiful outdoor gardens, play areas, exhibitions and more, a day here is an inspiring feast for the senses. If you want to get your hands dirty, sign up for Eden's immersive horticultural experience (£195), which includes a tour, hands-on gardening, a propagation workshop and biocontrol tips.

7 BEST FOR CORNISH CHARM

The Pier House, Cornwall

Centred around a historic harbour famous for its towering tall ships and television appearances (think Poldark, Hornblower and more), a visit to the Cornish town of Charlestown feels like stepping back in time. Overlooking both the Georgian harbour and the swirling sea, The Pier House is a handsome St Austell Brewery pub with rooms. Following a recent refurbishment, the thoughtful interiors are a mix of elegant coastal charm combined with plenty of historic Cornish character. Upstairs, an assortment of cosy, elegant bedrooms come in all shapes and sizes: some are dog friendly, whilst others have romantic window seats for soaking up the sea views. Downstairs, there's a busy bar and a relaxed restaurant area that serves up local ingredients and hearty pub grub. Outside, a spacious sun trap terrace awaits – perfect for kicking back with a pint of Korev and watching the waves roll in.

→ *Rooms start at £145 B&B; pierhousehotel.com*

8 BEST FOR WONDERFUL WALKS

The Star, East Sussex

In the picturesque medieval village of Alfriston, the immersive sense of history at The Star is evident before you've even crossed its wonky threshold. Outside sits a ship's lion-shaped figurehead, believed to have once belonged to an 18th century Dutch warship and brought to the village by smugglers! The quirky features and fascinating stories continue inside this atmospheric pub, which is today owned by hotel and design aficionados, Olga and Alex Polizzi. There are 29 luxurious bedrooms filled with fine art, sculpture, clashing colours and bold fabrics, as well as a dedicated library for guests. If you're feeling peckish, grab a table either in the elegant restaurant or cosy pub dining room, both of which serve delicious and refined Italian-inspired dishes. At the heart of the pub is a beautiful Provençal-stye terrace, filled with plants, chic furniture, and plenty of rosé.

→ *Rooms start at £260; thepolizzicollection.com/the-star*

While you're there...

The Star sits on the 100-mile-long South Downs Way – a popular and incredibly scenic route for walkers, cyclists, and horse riders. There are walks in every direction; short, long, high and low; level along the bends of the Cuckmere River towards the sea, or steep on the Downs and cliffs above. The Star provides various routes, all printed in handy pocked-sized pamphlets. Throughout the year, it also hosts two-night 'Ramblers Retreats' (from £970 based on two people sharing a room) in which owner Alex Polizzi leads guests on several walks throughout the stunning local countryside.

9 BEST FOR A GASTRONOMIC GETAWAY

The Merry Harriers, Surrey

Despite its close proximity to London, The Merry Harriers ticks all the idyllic country pub boxes. Sat in the pretty village of Hambledon near Godalming, this friendly spot has been recently taken on by locally-born Alex Winch and Sam Fiddian-Green; a dynamic duo who have preserved all the quirky charm of the characterful 16th century building and elevated it with a fresh, stylish colour palette, antique furniture and a refined, skilfully executed menu that attracts foodies from far and wide. Fifteen lovely bedrooms are spread across the pub and a separate block overlooking a pretty beer garden. Over the road, there's a handful of shepherd huts sat next to an idyllic pond. Room 2 is the one to book, with its soothing ochre walls, wooden beams, cosy sheepskins and grand linen pelmet above the bed, alongside luxuries such as Wildsmith toiletries and delectable homemade shortbread. Breakfast is another gastronomic delight – don't miss the chilli scrambled eggs.

→ *Rooms start at £140 B&B; merryharriers.com*

While you're there...

The Merry Harriers is perfectly positioned for exploring the Surrey Hills, which just so happen to be home to several terrific vineyards. There are five in total, which together form VoSH – Vineyards of the Surrey Hills. Each one offers interesting tours and delicious tastings as well as various events throughout the year, including outdoor art exhibitions, live music, theatre, and much more. Or you can just pop in for a glass of English sparkling amongst the vines.

ALBURY
ALBURY ESTATE

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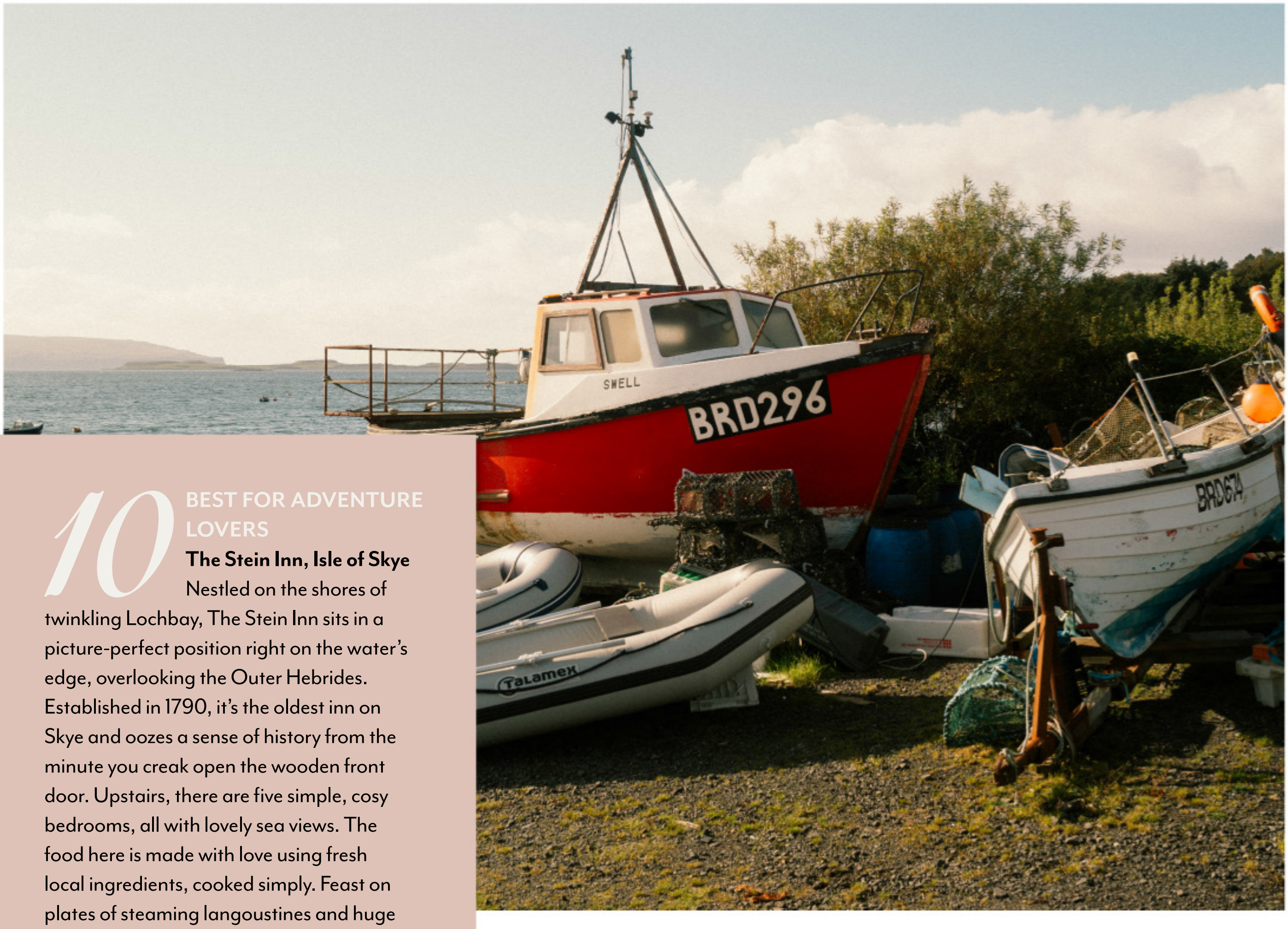

10

BEST FOR ADVENTURE LOVERS

The Stein Inn, Isle of Skye

Nestled on the shores of twinkling Lochbay, The Stein Inn sits in a picture-perfect position right on the water's edge, overlooking the Outer Hebrides. Established in 1790, it's the oldest inn on Skye and oozes a sense of history from the minute you creak open the wooden front door. Upstairs, there are five simple, cosy bedrooms, all with lovely sea views. The food here is made with love using fresh local ingredients, cooked simply. Feast on plates of steaming langoustines and huge lobsters and crabs, all caught fresh in the waters right outside the pub each day. Filled floor-to-ceiling with quirky knick-knacks, eye-catching artwork and endless flickering candles, this cosy and atmospheric pub is quite unlike anywhere else.

→ *Rooms start at £110 (low season), £245 (high), both B&B; thesteininn.co.uk*

While you're there...

Proudly run by the MacKay family, Diver's Eye is a boat trip business with over 35 years of experience. Passionate about sustainable tourism, it offers a wide range of nautical adventures from right outside The Stein Inn, including popular wildlife spotting trips that offer the opportunity to see whales, puffins, dolphins, seals, seabirds and more. Family-friendly fishing, wild swimming and bespoke charters are also available. All aboard!

CREATURE *comforts*

Slowly, quietly and ever so carefully, a brand-new 'farm retreat' has unfolded in the Dorset countryside… *British Travel Journal* gets immersed in the rural luxury of Louma

Text by Sophie Farrah

When Louis and Emma Steyn bought Spence Farm in 2019, the plan was to create a family home, but soon they realised that their newly acquired acres of unspoilt farmland, endless vines and sweeping countryside and sea views were just too special not to share, and so Louma was born.

Nestled within the Marshwood Vale between Bridport and Lyme Regis, Louma describes itself as a 'farm retreat'. If this conjures up thoughts of mud and a distinctive smell of sileage, then think again. Louma cleverly combines all the joys of the great outdoors with a level of luxury that is guaranteed to delight even the hardiest of boutique hotel lovers.

As the word 'retreat' suggests, once you've crossed Louma's unassuming threshold, passed the chickens, teeming veg beds, and the watchful gaze of several resident horses, there is no need to leave. Everything is catered for, including – ingeniously – all meals, so there's no stress about securing a table nearby. There's also a hugely stylish and serene spa, a multitude of wellbeing sessions on offer, friendly farm animals to meet, and more. Did I mention that Louma also has its very own 30-acre vineyard? In short, it is positively utopian.

My 'Louma-land' experience began weeks before I had even arrived, when I received an email from Laura Woollacott, Louma's friendly and incredibly efficient head of guest relations. Laura wanted to know what I liked (and didn't like) to eat, who I was travelling with, and what kind of activities we might like to do during our stay so that she and the team could create a 'truly personal experience' for us. This bespoke approach is not reserved for journalists alone, oh no – each and every Louma guest receives the same VIP treatment. I already felt spoiled, and I hadn't even packed.

This impressive level of warm and intuitive service continued from the minute I stepped into Louma's beautifully furnished Main Barn weeks later. I was greeted like an old friend, shown to a table on the terrace, and promptly handed a chilled glass of Louma's very own (delicious) sparkling wine. The views from the terrace, and across the entire farm, are indescribably beautiful; panoramic rolling green fields hug neat rows of vines, which stretch down towards the twinkling sea and Jurassic coastline beyond.

THE TRAVEL BOOK

> *Whilst I could have spent the entire weekend nibbling on the garden herb-laced shortbread... there was much to explore*

Despite its considerable 100-acre size, there are just 17 bedrooms at Louma, and the site is only open to guests who are staying overnight, so there is no scrabble for sunbeds or queues for lunch; instead, it is a deeply civilised and seriously relaxing affair. Accommodation is generously spread across several wooden cabins, stone barns and a smattering of shepherd's huts, which sit leaping distance from the outdoor pool.

I checked into the Main House which has six elegant bedrooms, as well as several immaculately designed communal spaces. These include a family-friendly library, and a cosy drawing room furnished with curated coffee table books, fascinating fossils, and a cosy wood burning stove. The Main House is also home to an informal dining room (where breakfast and dinner is served) which has huge Crittall doors that open out onto a beautifully planted terrace and an idyllic country garden. I stayed in a deeply serene suite called Eventide, filled with calming muted tones, pleasing pops of pattern, fresh flowers and inspiring books. Whilst I could have spent the entire weekend nibbling on the garden herb-laced shortbread provided and enjoying the far-reaching sea views from the sleek egg-shaped bath in the bedroom, there was much to explore.

The next 48 hours unfolded in what I can only describe as an almost surreally bucolic blur. It all started in the newly built Wellness Barn, just a stone's throw away from the Main House. Here, I discovered a streamlined swimming pool, smart sauna, seriously state-of-the-art gym and a decked terrace with sunbeds, chic parasols and more jaw-dropping views. The sleek spa is overseen by Bjorn Lonngren who, as Louma's charming wellness supervisor, has carefully curated a thoughtful and diverse spa offering by combining an array of therapies, treatments and classes, all executed by a host of handpicked expert practitioners.

In a cosy massage hut, I met local therapist Lisa Loader for an extraordinary craniosacral therapy session, where a gentle but powerful touch is applied to the body in order to release tension and blockages. I floated out feeling both physically and emotionally lighter.

Further relaxation can be found in Louma's Cow Barn – an elevated wooden structure meticulously hand built by local timber-framer Dave Burleigh and his team, which sits in the top corner of the vineyard. Underneath, sheep baa and cows ruminate whilst guests immerse themselves in all manner of wellbeing wonders in the space above, overlooking the vines and the sea beyond. Here, in this beautiful light-filled space connected to nature on all sides, I experienced a wonderfully restorative yoga class with experienced teacher Pip Scammell, followed by a truly transformational guided breathwork session with breath science practitioner, Natalie Vallely.

Beyond the impressive wellness offering, Louma has a team of friendly and enthusiastic people all waiting and wanting to share it with you. Vineyard manager Jonathan Atkin took me on a fascinating tour of the vines followed by a delicious and generous wine tasting out on the terrace.

The next day, I hopped into a golf buggy with enthusiastic farm technician Lucy Hobson, who introduced me to the resident cows, pigs, sheep and more. The joy I felt when cuddling one of Louma's newborn lambs was positively life-affirming. Later that evening, more joy ensued when duty manager Dan Voloaga took me on an impromptu frog spotting mission by torchlight, Famous Five-style.

I quickly realised that the land and its wild inhabitants are at the centre of everything at Louma; both figuratively and literally. I could have spent the whole day chatting with passionate gardeners Matteo Greggi and Cleodie Oliphant as they showed me around the impressive kitchen garden and explained their 'no-dig' approach. Improving and maintaining soil health via sustainable farming methods is a key aim at Louma; sheep have been introduced to eat the weeds in the vineyards (instead of using glyphosate), ponds have been installed to attract pollinators and help reintroduce wildlife, and hedges have been laid to promote habitats for small mammals and insects. The Steyn's intention is to create a legacy project for their young family, as well as the local birds, bats and bees.

Soon, lunch called. Louma's executive chef is John Long, formerly of River Cottage. His creative, sophisticated menus follow a farm-to-fork ethos using ingredients grown, reared and/or cultivated on site. Long lazy lunches of abundant help-yourself salads (grown in the garden), freshly baked breads, and homemade cakes are all neatly displayed, super fresh and full of flavour.

On both days I was treated to a generous piece of fish, locally landed, simply grilled, and paired perfectly with a chunky nasturtium pesto and a glass of Louma's zesty rosé.

Served in the main house, dinner is another gourmet affair, both skilfully preprepared and beautifully presented. Whilst meat-eaters are spoiled with the likes of cider braised pig cheeks, chateaubriand with wild garlic purée, and crispy confit duck with poached plum, I opted for the tempting vegetarian dishes. My plate of sweet roasted garden carrots was as pretty as a picture, with a generous pool of silky, gently spiced satay sauce dotted with crunchy wild rice granola, spiced carrot fritters, and zingy pickled carrot. I also loved the juicy garden heritage tomatoes, sat plumply in a refreshing tomato consommé, with creamy burrata and tomato granita adding satisfying texture. It was a sweet taste of Louma's vegetable garden on a warm summer's day.

Dessert did not disappoint either – particularly the feather-light whipped cheesecake; it was part crispy filo, part poached rhubarb, with moreish caramelised white chocolate

and a silky rhubarb sorbet. The dining room's woodburning stove ensures year-round cosiness, but as the weather was kind, I ate al fresco on the terrace amongst the glorious gardens, overlooking the sea as the sun went down and the moon came up. It was magical.

After a peaceful night's sleep and an early morning swim, breakfast really hit the spot. There's a bountiful mix of fresh juices, homemade jams, honey from Louma's hives, home-cured bacon, and raw milk from the cows, plus homemade pastries, granola, fresh eggs, smoothies and more. The Crittall doors of the dining room are flung open so that children can whizz in and out of the garden, toast in hand. There's a nostalgic sense of wholesome 'old fashioned' family holiday fun at Louma, where kids can go feral, plugged into nature instead of screens.

On my final day, I headed for the on-site Sandford Stables, where owner Lee and his daughter Molly took me on a glorious guided hack through the surrounding unspoilt countryside. I hadn't ridden since I was a child, but any nerves were quickly dispersed by my trusty steed, Buffalo, who was seemingly bombproof, along with Lee and Molly's warmth and obvious experience. More proficient riders can sign up for a 'three counties' hack, which travels through Dorset, Devon and Somerset (Louma sits close to the borders of all three).

I returned for one last lunch overlooking the vines and contemplated my stay. I'm tempted to use the 'home away from home' cliché, but Louma is so much more than that. From start to finish, the entire experience felt so deeply luxurious, with all the fabulous facilities, fantastic food and five-star comfort that you could ask for, not to mention the natural beauty of the place, and the genuine desire to look after it as sustainably as possible. But really, it is the kind, caring and intuitive teams across the whole site that make it extra special. I left Louma having been nurtured not only by the land, but by the people.

I headed down the drive, passed through the gates and reluctantly left Louma-land behind. 2025 will mark this special new farm retreat's very first summer, and I strongly suggest that you discover it before everyone else does. ◆

→ *Rooms at Louma start from £650 for a shepherd's hut, inclusive of breakfast, lunch and dinner for two guests; loumafarmandretreat.co.uk*

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RELAIS & CHATEAUX

Holiday HOT LIST

Our edit of the best fitness-related pieces and accessories to take with you on your next active break

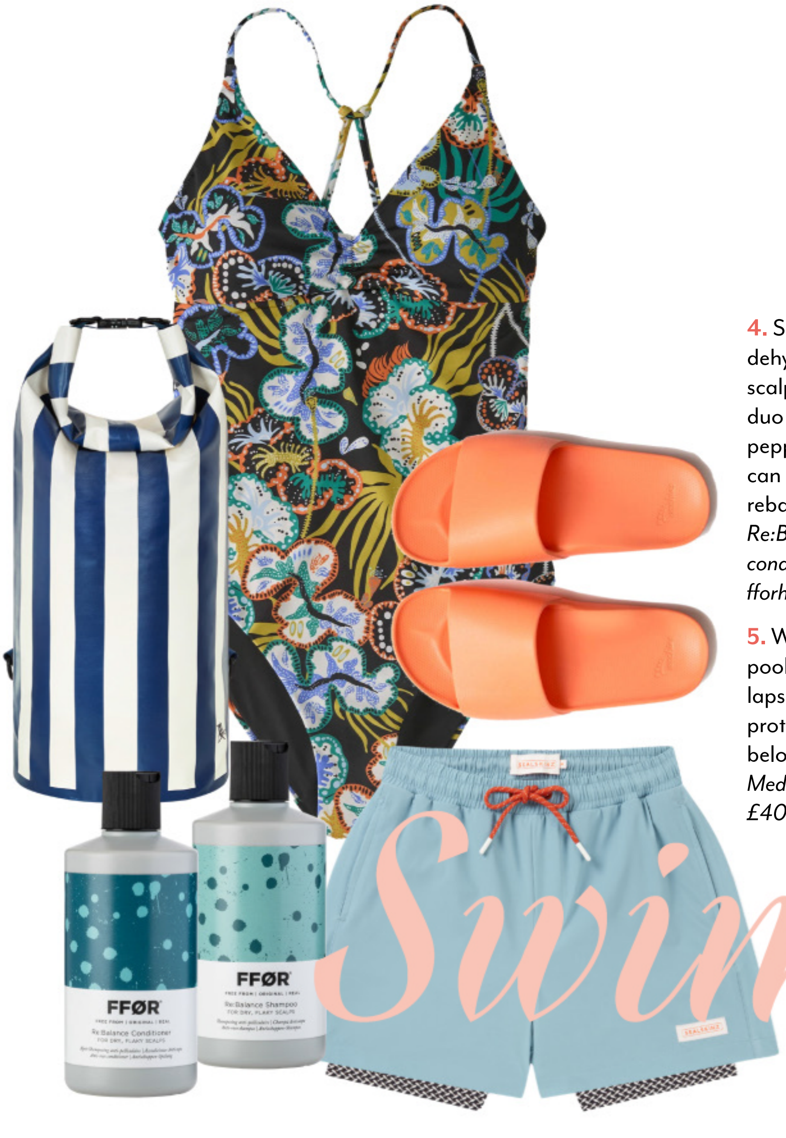
Text by Amy Bonifas

The active swim

1. Built for long swims and surfing, this sporty swimsuit offers good coverage and adjustable straps – plus it's Fair Trade-certified. *Women's Cross Shore swimsuit, £130, eu.patagonia*

2. With orthotic support and cell foam that moulds to your feet, these slides are cool, comfy, and ideal to wear pre- and post-swim. *Arch support pool sliders in Peach, £45, archiesfootwear.co.uk*

3. A suitcase staple, these quick-dry shorts have a gentle lining and even a buttoned back pocket – and come in a new range of summery colours and patterns. *Southwood quick-dry swim shorts, £75, sealskinz.com*



4. Sun and chlorine can dehydrate your hair and scalp, and this soothing duo made with organic peppermint and lemongrass can help refresh and rebalance your locks. *Re:Balance shampoo and conditioner duo, £13.50, fforhair.com*

5. Whether you're lounging poolside or clocking up the laps, this dry bag will help protect your clothes and belongings from splashes. *Medium waterproof dry bag, £40, uk.dockandbay.com*

The yoga or pilates class

1. Made with 100% natural, sustainably farmed rubber (and free from plastics), this hand-painted mat is ideal if you prefer to take your own along to class. *Kati Kaia Thalassa Yoga Mat, £95, warrioraddict.com*

2. Use this aromatherapy eye pillow, infused with soothing lavender and chamomile, to block out the light during your yoga wind-down or meditation. *Aromatherapy Liberty print eye pillow, £30, spritzwellness.com*

3. This top has secret support (so you don't need to wear a bra) and a soft V neckline to help you through sun salutations, Pilates roll-ups, and everything in between. *Unity crop top, £32, bambooclothing.co.uk*

4. Purifying, cleansing and restorative, these gorgeous-smelling yoga mat sprays are made with antibacterial essential oils like tea tree and lavender. *Yoga mat spray in Relax or Energise, £17 each, spritzwellness.com*

5. If you prefer a helping hand during your yoga poses, these blocks combine beauty and functionality and will help you stretch deeper. *Yoga block, £19.99, onyx-fitness.com*

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onyx
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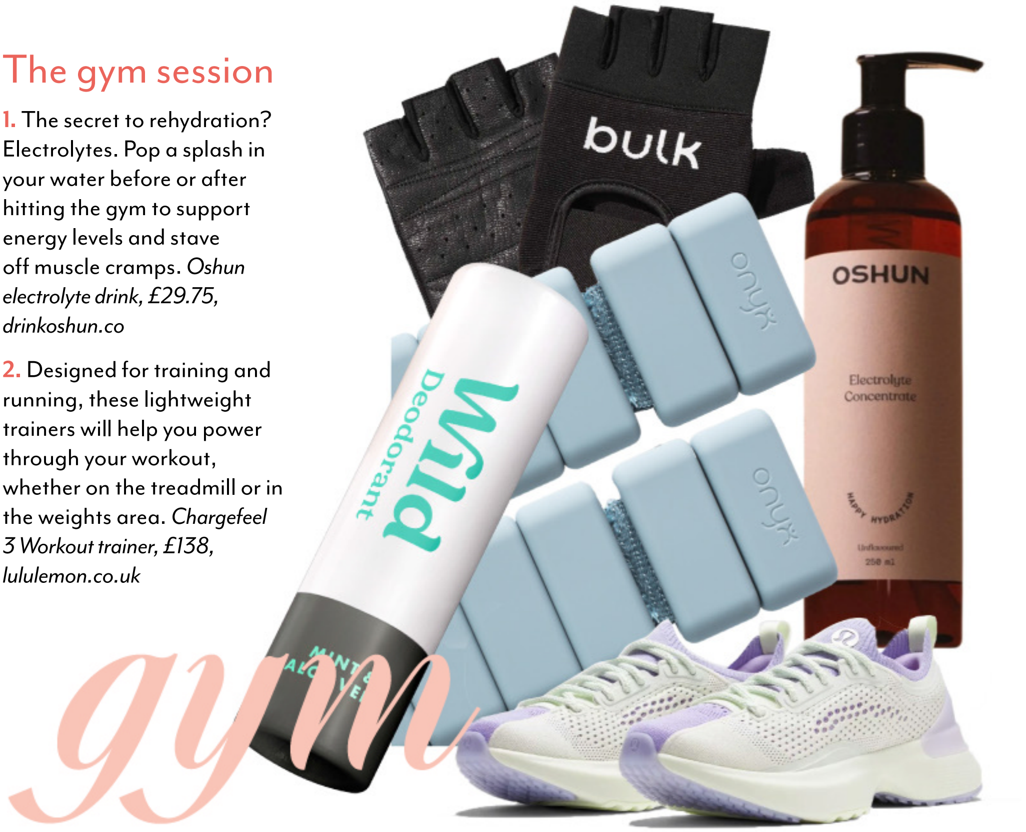
ENERGISE
mat cleaner
AROMATHERAPY
YOGA MAT SPRAY
RELAX
mat cleaner
AROMATHERAPY
BAM

The gym session

1. The secret to rehydration? Electrolytes. Pop a splash in your water before or after hitting the gym to support energy levels and stave off muscle cramps. *Oshun electrolyte drink, £29.75, drinkoshun.co*

2. Designed for training and running, these lightweight trainers will help you power through your workout, whether on the treadmill or in the weights area. *Chargefeel 3 Workout trainer, £138, lululemon.co.uk*



3. Easy to pop in your suitcase or gym bag, Wild's mini deodorants are plastic-free and vegan-certified. *Mini deodorant, £3.50, wearewild.com*

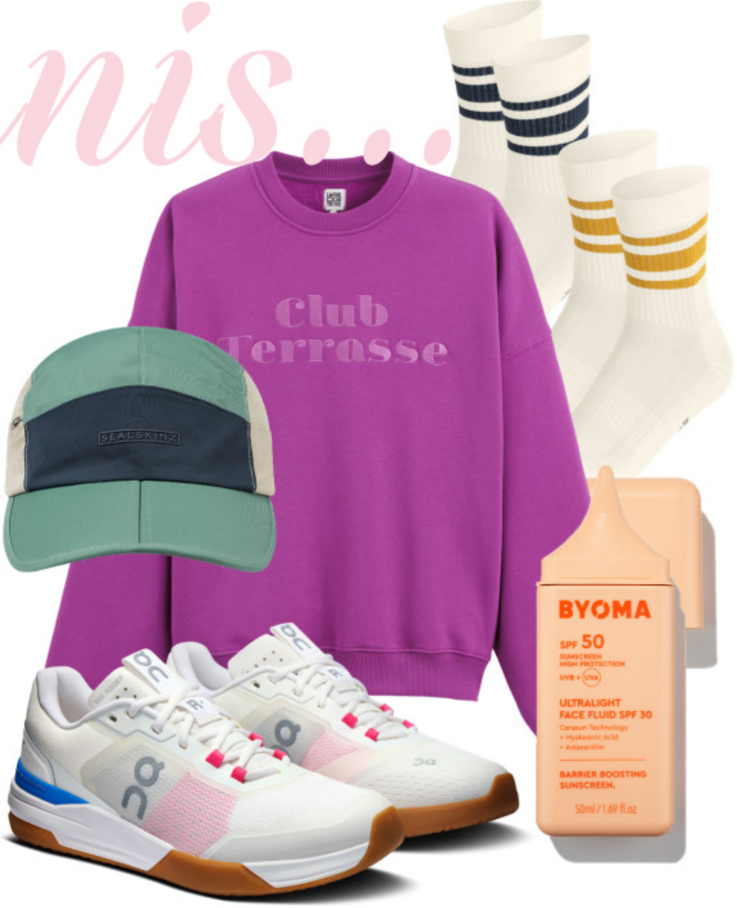
4. Add a little extra resistance to your workout with these beautifully versatile bracelet or ankle weights. *Bracelet weights, £34.99, onyx-fitness.com*

5. If you love training but hate the blisters, these training gloves are designed to give you a solid grip on barbells, kettlebells and pull-up bars, so you can keep pushing on. *Training gloves, £12.99, bulk.com*

The tennis (or padel) game

1. Fully waterproof, breathable, and foldable, this cap is smart and practical. Plus, it helps protect you from UV rays and has SPF protection 40+. *Mulbarton waterproof foldable pocket cap, £22.20, sealskinz.com*

2. Co-created with Roger Federer, these tennis shoes are designed for all kinds of court games – and have concealed CloudTec® for superlight cushioning. *THE ROGER Advantage Pro tennis trainer, £150, on.com*



3. When you need an extra layer, this stylish, summery sweatshirt is ideal to throw on during active days. *Cotton slogan sweatshirt, £24, laredoute.co.uk*

4. Made from breathable and moisture-wicking organic cotton, the targeted cushioning and material in these tennis socks keep your feet fresh as you serve and volley the day away. *Tennis socks, £33, danishendurance.com*

5. Trending suncream brand on the block Byoma delivers moisturising high-protection formulas to protect you on and off the court. *Ultralight face fluid SPF 50, £14.99, uk.byoma.com*

COASTAL DREAMS IN THE MUMBLES

Nestled by the water's edge in the heart of the picturesque Mumbles village, just a whisper away from the Wales Coast Path, lie two enchanting retreats: **Sea Watch** and **Seaview Cottage**. Picture yourself in Seaview Cottage, a bright yellow fisherman's haven, gazing out across the shimmering bay. Then there's Sea Watch, a newly refurbished boutique townhouse exuding sophisticated charm.

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DIVE IN *for* OUTDOOR *sweats* & COLD *dips*

With claims it reduces muscle pain, boosts immunity, improves circulation and even increases brain power, open water swimming seems a no brainer. Fancy giving it a go? *British Travel Journal* checks out the wildest swim breaks on offer

Text by Rebecca Pitcairn

1

BEST FOR A NIGHT SWIM

Another Place The Lake, Ullswater, Lake District

With some of the darkest skies in the country, The Lake District is a top place for stargazing but how about combining it with a wild swim? Sound a little scary?

Don't worry, you'll be in safe hands at Another Place The Lake, where English Channel solo swimmer, Colin Hill – who also happens to be the first UK man to swim a mile in water temperatures below five degrees Celsius – will accompany you as you enter the dark waters with a light-up tow float helping to guide the way.

Bob along and admire the moon and Milky Way above before heading back to your shepherd hut to warm up by the log burner. There's even a window above the bed should you want to continue your star spotting while under the duvet.

→ *Rooms from £195 per room per night. Night swims run year-round, start at 9pm and cost £40pp for 60 minutes. During June and July, when it is still light, they will be twilight swims; another.place/the-lake*

2

BEST FOR TOTAL SECLUSION

Ditchling Cabin, near Hassocks, East Sussex

Considered one of the most secluded overnight stays in the Southeast of England, Ditchling Cabin offers a completely private wild swimming experience thanks to its setting on a private lake in the heart of the South Downs National Park. Guests have the entire lake to themselves, with direct access from a private deck and jetty. Designed with wellness and reconnection in mind, the two-bedroom cabin pairs rustic charm with modern comfort – including a lakeside hot tub, roll-top bath and a plush emperor-sized bed overlooking the water. It's a place to unplug, slow down and embrace nature. Wild swim, paddleboard or simply sit and watch the herons and kingfishers from the deck.

→ *From £420 per night; ditchlingcabin.com*

3 BEST FOR A DESIGNER SWIM

The Watershed, Bosham, West Sussex

Described by Grand Designs presenter Kevin McCloud as a 'joyful, aquatic Eden', The Watershed in Bosham appears to float over a crystalline natural swimming pond. Regularly used as a backdrop for TV, film and magazine shoots, the award-winning property has enough room to sleep ten people when privately rented so you can enjoy the benefits of natural bathing with family and friends. Chemical-free and only heated naturally by the sun, it makes for a refreshing dip in summer or a therapeutic cold water immersion in winter.

The venue, which also has a hot tub, floating sauna and stunning gardens that meander the exterior of the property, also hosts restorative retreats combining swimming with yoga, meditation, sound baths and cacao ceremonies.

→ *Exclusive use from £1,680 per night. The next Restorative Retreat, on 19 September 2025, costs from £185 per person; thewatershed.co.uk*

4 BEST FOR BEING TRULY WILD

South Lodge, Horsham, West Sussex

South Lodge is already renowned for its multi-million-pound award-winning spa facilities, including a small outdoor natural pool, but stroll along the woodland path that leads away from the main building and you'll find a hidden lake surrounded by eight ultra-luxury lodges, called The Reeds. Hotel guests get free use of the lake at certain times of the day but a series of Wild Swimming Weekends, led by expert wild swimming coach and Outdoor Swimmer Magazine founder Ella Foote, are open to non-residents. They've gone all out to create this wild swimming experience; not only do you get use of the beautifully branded dry robes, wetsuits (should you want them), tow floats and swim hats, you'll also be swimming alongside water lilies grown from cuttings taken directly from Monet's garden at Giverny. Lunch at the spa restaurant, Botanica, is also included and you can book additional one-to-one coaching sessions with Ella for £35 per 30 minutes.

→ *19 July and 20 September 2025, £210 per person day only, from £645 per room with an overnight stay and breakfast; exclusive.co.uk/south-lodge*

5 BEST FOR GOING OFF-GRID

One Cat Farm, Lampeter, Wales

An independent and sustainably run business started just over a decade ago by former Londoners Jessie and Lyndon Roberts-Duffey, One Cat Farm is a charming woodland escape just four miles from the coast of Cardigan Bay. The three-acre pig farm turned nature reserve features four eco-cabins designed for a totally off-grid experience and are centred around a wild nature pond fed by rainfall and springs at their base. Swimmers will share the pond with native wildlife like kingfishers, otters and herons and there's also a rowing boat, should you prefer to stay above the surface. A jetty provides a good flat surface for a spot or morning waterside yoga and kids will love jumping from the rope swing straight into the water below.

→ *Prices start from £298 for a two night midweek break in low season with a 15 per cent discount for solo travellers; onecatfarm.com*

6 BEST FOR A COUNTRY ESCAPE

Swinton Estate, Ripon, North Yorkshire

Encouraging people to enjoy the great outdoors is central to the ethos of Swinton Estate and with 20,000 acres of Yorkshire countryside to explore, there's plenty to inspire. That includes two options for wild swimming; a bio-filtered natural pool and Coffin Lake – named after the Roman-style coffins found within the grounds – which has a purpose-built platform so swimmers can lower themselves into the calm water with ease. Whether you decide to wear a wetsuit or brave it in bathers, there are plenty of thermal experiences on offer at Swinton Country Club to warm you up after your swim.

WILD
SWIMMING
PLATFORM

Feel your muscles relax in the naturally fragranced aroma steam room, congestion ease with a visit to the salt room or you could stick to the outdoors and nestle under sheepskins around the fire pit.

→ *Rooms at Swinton Park Hotel from £360 for B&B, which includes access to The Country Club & Spa and wild swimming; swintonestate.com*

7 BEST FOR ISLAND PARADISE

Burgh Island, Bigbury-on-Sea, Devon

The iconic Burgh Island retreat, which sits on its own tidal island off the rugged Devonshire coastline, featured in a recent edition of *British Travel Journal* as the setting for the BBC dramatisation of Agatha Christie murder mystery, Towards Zero. An enchanting base for a weekend of wild swimming, its star feature is the Mermaid Pool – a naturally replenished tidal seawater pool, sheltered by rock formations that create a lagoon-like ambience perfect for an invigorating swim. The hotel's holistic Wild & Well experience combines a stay in a signature Art Deco room – each bearing the name of a famous guest from a bygone era, including Agatha – with access to wellness sessions and curated wild swimming excursions around the island, including guided access to the Mermaid Pool.

→ *The Wild & Well experience costs £40pp per person. Rooms from £399 per night with dinner on Dine On Us package, based on two people sharing; burghisland.com*

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taymouthmarina.com

8 BEST FOR PURE SCOTTISH MAGIC

Taymouth Marina Lochside Spa Resort, Highland Perthshire

Be among the first to experience the HotBoat, where you can dive headfirst into the tranquil waters of Loch Tay after experiencing the deep heat and relaxion from Scotland's first floating sauna. This unique one hour experience is born from the resort's award-winning HotBox Spa, which includes an outdoor heated pool, spa bar, sauna, steam room, jetty and slide, perfect for diving or sliding into the Loch Tay! There's also a relaxing outdoor terrace, ice buckets and more, surrounded by magnificent views. With either experience, you can feel the rush of a loch dip, bask in the warmth of a wood-fired sauna, and soak up the stunning Highland scenery. Taymouth Marina will also be launching HotBoat Cruises on Loch Tay this summer – sign up to the mailing list for details and launch dates.

→ *Stays start from £190 per night for a one-bedroom waterfront apartment, three night stay minimum. Every stay includes a complimentary session at the award-winning HotBox Spa, and in celebration of the launch of HotBoat, guests staying in the Houseboats, prices from £190 per night with a minimum two stay, can enjoy a complimentary HotBoat session; taymouthmarina.com*

9 BEST FOR STYLISH SCANDI VIBES

Wellbeing in the Wild at Lime Cross Nursery, Herstmonceux, East Sussex

Nestled behind Lime Cross Nursery, which in a previous life was world famous for its conifers, is a tranquil little Nordic inspired wild swimming spot run by sisters Vicky and Helen Tate. Having diversified their family's garden centre business into a vineyard and wellbeing hub, the pair run yoga and Pilates retreats on the banks of their natural pond. But you can also stay the night in the striking ÖÖD house – an Estonian-inspired mirrored glass cabin designed to blend into its surroundings. Guests get private access to the pond with their own jetty and stand up paddle boards. Warm up after a dip with a glass of wine from The Secret Vineyard while sitting in the outdoor wood-fired hot tub. There's also a shepherd's hut a little further up the bank, where you'll have the family's Shetland ponies and alpacas as neighbours.

→ *From £320 per night; limecross.co.uk*

10 BEST FOR SEA DIPS AND HOT SIPS

Ballygally Castle Hotel, Antrim Coast, Northern Ireland

If you're brave enough to submerge yourself in the cold waters where the Irish and Atlantic Seas meet, this wild swimming break is for you. Take advantage of the beauty of the Antrim Coast with a galvanising stay at the 400-year-old Ballygally Castle, which sits just steps from the water's edge. Whether you just dip your toes or dive right in, once you've embraced the refreshing chill just across the golden sands in front of the castle, you'll have all you need to bring your fingers, toes and everything in-between back to life provided; from dry robes, to hot water bottles, slippers and a flask filled with a hot drink of your choice. Stays include a full Irish breakfast and a cosy night in one of the 18 coastal view rooms.

→ *Prices from £175 per room per night; hastingshotels.com*

Best of the rest...

• BEST FOR CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT

The Wim Hof Retreat, Goodwood, West Sussex

This one-night retreat at Goodwood Health Club (part of the Goodwood Estate) includes teaching from certified instructor, Sarah Huntley, on how to stimulate physiological processes through the Wim Hof Method, which includes ice baths and breathing techniques.

→ *14 June and 24 October 2025, £550 per person including meals, daily talks and workshops and a night at The Goodwood Hotel; goodwood.com*

• BEST FOR SECLUSION AND AQUAMARINE SEAS

Blockhouse Cottage, Tresco Island

28 miles off the Cornish coast, Tresco's Blockhouse Cottage is spacious enough for 14 people, and just steps from the deserted, turquoise waters of Green Porth beach. With unbeatable ocean views, romantic seclusion, a home spa, private yoga and Pilates studio, it's an idyllic escape with plenty of opportunity for sea dips. If it sounds too big, explore Tresco's other properties with last-minute summer availability.

→ *One week from £10,420, other July and August availability from £2,050, with access to the Island Spa and Tresco Abbey Garden included; tresco.co.uk/staying/offers-and-breaks*

• BEST FOR A REALLY WILD EXPERIENCE

Wild With Nature, Shropham, Norfolk

Whether you choose to stay in the huts or yurts set amidst the 694 acres of woodland and meadows at Wild With Nature, you'll be certain of an immersive outdoor experience and plenty of lakes to take a dip in.

→ *Prices start from £330 per night for a group of six (two-night minimum stay); wildwithnature.co.uk*

• BEST FOR WOMEN ONLY

The Salt Sisterhood, Falmouth, Cornwall

Enjoy a five-night yoga and wild swimming retreat with the Salt Sisterhood run by Lauren Biddulph at her private country home on the banks of the Helford River. The package included daily yoga and meditation sessions, nourishing meals and guide walks to discover new and secluded swim spots.

→ *Retreats take place in June and September and cost from £1,400pp; thesaltsisterhood.com*

• BEST FOR FESTIVAL-STYLE FUN

Slomo, Christchurch

Nestled between the Avon and Stour rivers, Elkins boatyard is home to a pop-up sauna run by Camp Bestival co-founders, former Radio 1 DJ Rob De Bank and his wife, Josie. There's an ice bath for contrast or you can go for a swim in the river.

→ *Until 31 August, £15 for 60 minutes; slomo.me*

IMAGES: ANOTHER PLACE © MICHAEL LAZENBY/LEWIS HARRISON-PINDER. DITCHLING CABIN © IAN PACK. WILM HOF AT GOODWOOD © CHRISTOPHER ISON. BLOCKHOUSE COTTAGE © BRYHER CAMPSITE

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HEAT WAVE…

With Britain's wild sauna movement heating up, Emma O'Kelly recommends ten places across Britain to give the experience a go this summer

Britain's untamed fringes are dotted with wild saunas, more than 200 strong, each battling the elements to offer a blend of outdoor adventure and invigorating hot-cold therapy.

Drawing inspiration from Nordic bathing cultures, where sauna is a way of life and steam, or *löyly*, is essential in these often repurposed spaces – think horseboxes or trailers provide unique sanctuaries. Bathers relax, witnessing nature while embracing this tradition. More than just heat, these experiences foster community, aid in mental and physical wellbeing, and leave visitors with a renewed sense of energy and a visible glow.

Wales

• WILDWATER, PEMBROKESHIRE

Wildwater Sauna moves around every four weeks, drawing a cult following among swimmers, surfers and Pembrokeshire locals in the process. Popular spots are Newgale, Nolton Haven, Little Haven, Whitesands and Porthclais. Wildwater founders Scott Chalmers and Richard Lynch are documentary filmmakers who set up the sauna as a side hustle after travels to Estonia. They had the six-seater trailer made in Denmark, and they often pitch up in spots with no phone signal, which fits with their 'primal' approach. On full moon evenings, when it's calm and clear, Scott and Richard organise special sauna, swim and meditation sessions. And regular beach cleans happen whenever the sauna is open.

→ *wildwatersauna.com*

• SEA + STEAM, PEMBROKESHIRE

In the village of Saundersfoot, home to the largest New Year's Day Swim in the UK, Sea + Steam is one of the few saunas within the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park to have a permanent site. Set on the promenade above the beach, with a large viewing window and a bespoke changing area, it is open seven days a week. The sauna's founders, Bryony and Kerry, promote physical and mental health through sauna use, and support biodiversity projects in the harbour. The lighting is solar-powered, the logs are sourced from just 0.2 miles away, and the ash is disposed of in the adjacent community garden.

→ *seaandsteam.co.uk*

Scotland

• SOUL WATER SAUNA, EDINBURGH

When she moved to Edinburgh, Kirsty Carver launched a community to exchange time and skills instead of money. Many of this community came with her when she opened Soul Water Sauna on Edinburgh's Portobello Beach in 2022. It's still there, and such is its popularity that Kirsty opened a second, bigger site in nearby Granton in 2024. Set in a post-industrial landscape, the Granton site feels wild, but not deserted. Two saunas hold 12 people each, there are showers, changing rooms, cold plunges made from beer fermentation cylinders, a beach and windswept views of the Firth of Forth.

→ *soulwatersauna.com*

• SALTBOX SAUNA, HARRIS

Travelling between Lewis, Harris and Uig, Saltbox is currently the only wood-fired sauna in the Outer Hebrides. It's the brainchild of Norma MacLeod, an open water swimming coach and ex-competitive swimmer based in Stornoway. In 2019, Norma co-founded Immerse Hebrides, which runs retreats, swim tours and boat trips around the islands, and she knows all the local beauty spots. Servicing them with a mobile sauna was a natural next step. Saltbox is the very definition of a wild sauna – the fact that there are often no toilets or running water hasn't dented its popularity. In fact, it's so popular that Saltbox2 will soon be launching on North Uist.

→ *saltboxsauna.co.uk*

South

• COMMUNITY SAUNA BATHS, LONDON

It's hard to underestimate the impact of not-for-profit Community Sauna Baths on the UK sauna scene. Opening in the backyard of a former public baths in Hackney Wick more than three years ago, it now has sister sites in Bermondsey, Stratford, Peckham, Camberwell, and Walthamstow. More than just a place to sweat, CSB is a welcoming space where people relax, connect and share experiences. A true community hub, it fosters a sense of belonging and wellbeing through the simple act of gathering in the heat. Myth-telling saunas, sound bath saunas and more are held here and CSB works with the NHS and charities to offer free sauna sessions.

→ *community-sauna.co.uk*

• SAMPHIRE SAUNA, HASTINGS

The first sauna to get a permanent home on a seaside pier in the UK, Samphire is a haven of calm, especially during early morning sessions when the rest of the pier is still closed and cold-water swimmers head up to one of

its two four-person saunas to warm up after their dip. Founders Nell and Zoya are part of Hastings' lively creative scene; so too is the pier, which won the Stirling Prize for Architecture when it was rebuilt in 2017. Summer evenings find the pier alive with skaters, concerts and a string of outdoor events. The saunas, screened off with deck chairs and a sun terrace, feel private and cocooned with soothing views of the sea.

→ *samphiresauna.co.uk*

South West

• THE SALTWATER SAUNA, DORSET

'As hard as getting tickets for Glastonbury' is how one local describes booking a session at The Saltwater Sauna in Sandbanks. This early adopter opened in lockdown and hasn't looked back. In 2024, it won best design at the inaugural British Sauna Society Awards while its resident sauna therapist, Jane Witt, scooped the prize for best sauna practitioner. Despite the accolades, Saltwater's founders are not resting on their laurels. A sister site is now open at Avon Beach in Christchurch and there are bigger plans for Sandbanks, where a third location is in the pipeline.

→ *thesaltwatersauna.com*

• REVIVE WILD SAUNA, DORSET

It was a heated race to open the first floating sauna in the UK and Revive Wild Sauna were the winners. The six-person barrel sauna at Portland Marina migrated off its temporary trailer location and onto a permanent floating pontoon in 2024, and others are sure to follow. It sits next to a large, decked area with ladders into the sea and offers a plunge bath for those who don't fancy the saltwater option. Being tucked behind its own breakwater means the sauna is accessible in all weathers.

→ *revivewildsauna.co.uk*

North

• POOL BRIDGE FARM, YORKSHIRE

For years, the lakes at Pool Bridge Farm were one of the best fisheries in the north of England. Today, however, these 137 acres of rewilded land outside York are one of the country's best wild swimming spots. Facebook group The Pool Bridge Farm Swimmers has more than 11,000 members, and to service them, discreetly situated around one of the four lakes, are four saunas. Bathers pay for an hour's sauna session but can stay to swim and relax by the lakes all day. There is also a cafe and ten-acre campsite, ideal for tents and small campervans, while other areas offer paddleboarding and kayaking (bring your own).

→ *poolbridge.co.uk*

• LA'AL SAUNA, CUMBRIA

You have to have next-level multi-tasking skills to be a wild sauna operator. Debbie Noble of La'al is one such 'supertasker'. She built her sauna from a 1950s horsebox alone in a field in the middle of winter, wrangling with the National Trust for permission to set it up while going through breast cancer treatment. In winter, La'al (which means 'little' in Cumbrian dialect) operates from Fell Foot Park, a popular swimming spot located at the southern end of Lake Windermere. In summer, Debbie plans to host sauna nights on the shoreline of Coniston Water.

→ *laalsauna.co.uk*

→ *Wild Sauna: The Best Outdoor Sweats & Cold Dips in Britain by Emma O'Kelly, was published in May 2025 (£18.99, wildthingspublishing.com)*

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WHERE THE MOORS *meet the sea*

British Travel Journal heads north for a nature-inspired stay at Yorkshire's brand-new wellness destination, Saltmoore

Text by Sophie Farrah

Idyllically positioned between the wild North Sea and the heather-clad North Yorkshire Moors, an exciting new hotel has recently opened its doors. What was once the somewhat tired Raithwaite Sandsend hotel has been transformed into a new luxury escape, influenced and inspired by nature at every turn.

After a picture-perfect drive though the breathtaking scenery of the North York Moors National Park, I began to make my descent and eventfully dipped down on to a stretch of unspoilt coast road. Somewhere in between Whitby and Sandsend, I saw a chic swing sign for Saltmoore and turned up a driveway lined with windswept trees.

SALTMOORE
HOTEL, RESTAURANT & SPA

Saltmoore describes itself as a 'wellness-led sanctuary', with food, interiors, activities and even spa treatments all inspired by the local landscape. Nestled within an expanse of 85 wild acres, there are 72 bedrooms spread across two distinctive buildings. There is The Beach House: a relaxed, family- and dog- friendly 29-room space, with coastal-inspired rooms, woodland views, outdoor tubs, and its own bar, bedecked in beachy blue and white stripes. A little further down the drive, I checked in at the somewhat sultrier Saltmoore House, a serene, sophisticated space, and the site of the 19th century estate's original 'big house', first built by a prominent local shipbuilding family. Today it contains 43 chic bedrooms and suites, a state-of-the-art spa and stylish spaces designed for drinking, dining and unwinding.

The recent £10 million refurbishment of the hotel is just a small part of a wider redevelopment of the estate, which includes the construction of nearly 200 holiday homes over the coming years. There's a surprising team behind this impressive and sizeable project, including two construction and property development firms, and former 'Love Island' star Montana Brown, who has been instrumental in the creation of the hotel's new, noteworthy interiors.

Speaking of which, all of the elegant bedrooms within Saltmoore House are incredibly tasteful, with luxurious, contemporary design schemes all inspired by the sea and moors. My room for the night – the irresistibly romantic Heather Suite – is an ode to the native Yorkshire shrub, and has a pleasing palette of muted purples, earthy tones and calming creams, combined with tasteful dried flowers and a melange of cosy natural materials like linen, hessian, sheepskin and wool. On a chic antique dresser, I discovered some delicious dark chocolate cookies and two small bottles of cordial made from foraged fruits and herbs. Already I felt well and truly immersed in the local landscape.

In a separate sitting room, a huge dark red roll-top bath sits carefully positioned beneath the window so that the leafy trees can be admired from the tub. There's a seemingly endless supply of heavenly scented Wildsmith products and plenty of locally sourced tea and coffee, plus underfloor heating throughout, a separate bathroom cleverly partitioned by a Crittall wall, and a bed big enough for four, at least. I felt instantly cocooned and utterly spoilt.

After a long drive, my first port of call was the hotel's small but perfectly formed spa, known as 'The Sanctuary'. Fluffy robe and slippers on, I headed downstairs and discovered more soothing interiors. Intermingled with large leafy plants and oversized cream-coloured sun loungers, each one furnished with a neatly rolled stripey towel, there's a sleek swimming pool, Himalayan salt sauna, steam room, jacuzzi and a high tech 'Brass Monkey' ice bath – all of which cleverly face the floor-to-ceiling glass windows that overlook the hotel grounds and let the outside in. It is extremely picturesque, and deeply serene. There's also a state-of-the-art cryotherapy chamber, and a light and airy wellness café perfect for a fruit smoothie or nutritious bone broth post-swim. The cosy, wood panelled treatment rooms are also incredibly Insta-worthy. After a very good facial using Wildsmith's botanical-rich, circadian rhythm-inspired products, I scampered back up to my suite to get ready for dinner.

With no room service on offer, I ventured downstairs for a pre-dinner drink in the comfortable candlelit bar which has several perfectly snug nooks, soft lighting and a choice of games and coffee table books. One couple were battling it out in a card game, whilst a cheerful mother and daughter took it turns to complete Solitaire. You could lose a whole afternoon in here, at least.

I surveyed the choice of creative cocktails on offer and decided to tap into the knowledge of the friendly and enthusiastic bar team. I plumped for a deliciously herbaceous Sandsend negroni, made using rhubarb schnapps, a bitter herb liqueur and a sweet vermouth, all made in house.

Next, a Foraged Old Fashioned bursting with flavour, made with a citrussy hogweed tincture and a spiced rum laced with pineappleweed, anise hyssop and woodruff.

This was just a first taste of both the skill and ethos behind Saltmoore's food and drink offering. At the helm of the kitchen is Adam Maddock, former head chef of The Fife Arms in Braemar, whilst menus have been developed with the assistance of celebrity chef Tommy Banks, of the Michelin-starred Black Swan at Oldstead. I couldn't have enjoyed my Whitby crab tart starter more; a beautifully thin pastry case laced with fennel, generously filled with white and brown

crab meat decadently stirred through with caramelised cream and topped with pickled cucumber and dill to cut through the richness. It was perfect.

Smart Saltmoore-branded plates came flying out of the kitchen; I spied spirals of Mangalitza Cumberland sausage, a plump Yorkshire duck breast, baked celeriac, and gargantuan steaks, all looking hearty and hefty in true Yorkshire fashion. I opted for a generous monkfish tail which arrived perfectly grilled and simply salted, served with a crisp garden salad and crunchy pork fat chips. A bowl of creamed leeks topped with panko breadcrumbs and bubbling cheese made for a showstopping side.

The dessert menu offered yet more creativity and intriguing local ingredients, such as tonka bean crème brûlée with a heather honey madeleine, and a tempting tiramisu made with Saltmoore blend coffee, mascarpone, and chicory root liqueur. I couldn't resist the decadent Baked Alaska. Filled with forced Yorkshire Rhubarb, creamy custard and a delicate vanilla flavour thanks to some local meadowsweet, it offered a deeply pleasing taste of the surrounding countryside.

An incredibly comfortable bed combined with utter peace and quiet made for a very good night's sleep. Joyful birdsong woke me early, so I pulled on my boots and went for a stroll around Saltmoore's beautiful grounds. Close to the house, beyond the spacious terrace, lie elegantly manicured

> *Next, I ventured to Whitby… I walked in Bram Stoker's footsteps… devoured fish and chips with mushy peas… scaled the 199 steps up to the atmospheric Abbey ruins, and then treated myself to one of Botham's famous lemon buns.*

landscaped gardens. Walk a little further, through the woods, past the lake, and it gets wonderfully wild. There's also an impressive 'no dig' kitchen garden operation underway, and an old orchard with an abundance of fresh Yorkshire rhubarb, the sight of which roused happy memories of last night's delicious dessert.

Branded golf buggies and friendly staff are on hand to whizz guests from A to B, so I hitched a ride back to Saltmoore House just in time for breakfast. It's served in the Orangery – another beautifully designed space flooded with natural light and statement flower arrangements – a combination of fresh and dried. A mug of Yorkshire Tea and a plate of creamy scrambled eggs and smoked salmon really hit the spot, and the granola was so good that I asked for the recipe.

Like any self-respecting holidaymaker, I then headed for the beach. A sweeping expanse of sand sits just across the road at the end of Saltmoore's driveway, perfectly positioned for a bracing dip, if you're feeling brave enough. I opted to walk along the beach instead, and around 30 minutes later came to the charming seaside village of Sandsend, which is home to several cafés, a handful of shops and a perfect little pub called The Hart Inn. Also worth a visit is Mary's brilliant sandwich bar, or if you're craving seafood then make a beeline for The Fish Cottage.

Next, I ventured to Whitby, which is less than a 10-minute drive from Saltmoore. There is so much to love about this characterful town steeped in history and gothic intrigue: I walked in Bram Stoker's footsteps (the town inspired his Dracula), devoured fish and chips with mushy peas (known locally as 'Yorkshire caviar'), scaled the 199 steps up to the atmospheric Abbey ruins, and then treated myself to one of Botham's famous lemon buns. After watching the sun set over the tall ships in the harbour, I picked up some of Fortune's famous smoked kippers to take home. I had wanted to visit this part of the country for so long but had never managed to find somewhere special to stay, until now.

Surprisingly for such a new hotel, Saltmoore already feels so in sync with its surroundings. Whilst checking out, the friendly reception team excitedly tell me of the hotel's future plans: there's a spa expansion in the pipeline, as well as a pizzeria, a family-friendly swimming pool, and a hyper-local fine dining restaurant due to open this summer. It seems that there are plenty of excuses to return to this stylish and serene seaside sanctuary soon – not that I needed any.

→ *Rooms at Saltmoore start at £350; saltmoore.co.uk*

A SLICE *of farm life*

This 16th century Fowlescombe Farm has been brought back to life, and its 450-acre organic and regenerative farm supports both the restaurant and much of the design of the suites. *British Travel Journal* heads to the newest countryside bolthole that's doing things differently

Text by Emma Henderson

"We're going to be doing these things anyway, so we might as well get guests to join in," explains Caitlin Ownes, co-owner of the newly opened Fowlescombe Farm in South Devon. I'm staying here for the weekend, and she's explaining the ethos of the farm's laid-back optional activity schedule.

It's the antithesis of organised fun here. No one has to officially sign up as the activity is part of the farm's day to day, and will go on regardless. Caitlin's gently luring me into joining wild swimming first thing tomorrow morning at neary Bigbury beach, and it doesn't take long for me to agree – though actually getting in the sea in just a cossie on May 1 is another matter altogether. Thankfully, I manage the quickest of dips and relish in such an invigorating start to the morning. Better yet, there's hot chocolate and pastries as a reward, and we'll even make it back in time for a proper breakfast at the farm.

Fowlescombe is a brand new farm retreat here in Devon's South Hams near the village of Ugborough, on the edge of wild Dartmoor. The 450-acre estate feels remote and is found down windy country lanes, surrounded by verdant rolling hills with ancient trees, revived ponds full of greenery and luscious looking farmland. It's part of a new breed of farm stays inspired

by the European agriturismo format (the combination of agriculture and tourism) that are springing up across the UK, focusing on home-grown food, relaxed itineraries around the farm and inspiring a closer connection to the land. It's owned by Caitlin's family and it's her experience working at the Four Seasons and the Relais & Châteaux chain along with her partner Paul Glade's background in design and architecture that sees them running the show at Fowlescombe.

When I visit just as the farm opens to the public, we're being treated to a dose of early summer weather, with mid-20s temperatures and a full blue sky. As we arrive, we sit on the outside tables with a coffee and we're brought our welcome

PIET OUDOLF AT WORK

FOWLESC
FARM .153
Wednesa
Cornish Mackerel
Manx Loaghtan
Rhubarb

cream tea from our room to enjoy alfresco, too. Despite my location, I of course opt for the Cornish way – jam first. We soon meet Basil, a very tall and friendly black Labrador belonging to head gardener, Shelley Oakenham. On his collar reads: "I'm Basil and I work here". Over the weekend, he seems to mostly lazily lounge on lawns or in the greenhouse and clearly has the best job going.

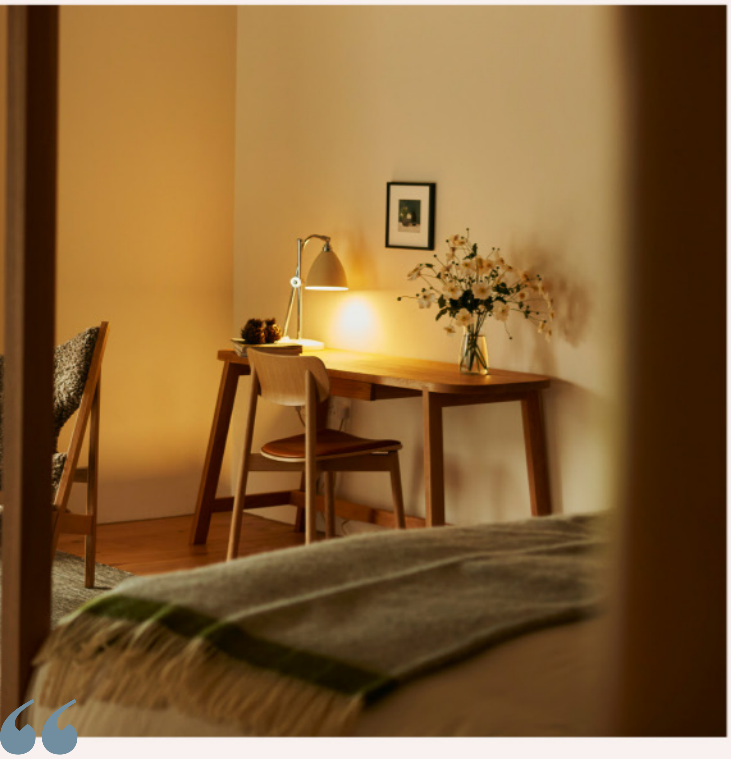
Aside from a friendly welcome from Basil and the team, there's no check-in desk or reception, instantly setting itself apart from a more formal hotel. Instead, the site's hub is The Refectory, a fitting name that comes from the Latin "to restore", a nod to the farm's ethos. Designed as a multipurpose communal space, here you'll find staff and have breakfast, dinner and pre-dinner drinks, which can also be enjoyed in the large greenhouse that's an activity space too. The open kitchen feels like an at-home kitchen-diner set up, and naturally encourages chatting to staff, plus hearing (and seeing) more about where the food comes from.

"Staff are usually so busy they don't have time to speak to guests anymore," says the hotel manager, Pim Wolfs. "They're losing the art of hospitality – and we're bringing it back," which they're clearly succeeding at.

One of the chefs cooking our breakfast explains that while their hens' eggs are slightly smaller, surprisingly, almost all of them are double yolkers. Breakfast begins with a selection of pastries, bread and cultured butter, jam and local cheese and cured meats. The charcuterie is so fantastic, I'm repeatedly going back for more. It's all made and cured on-site at the family's other business, Rare & Pasture. Then there's the hot menu, ranging from porridge to a full Fowlescombe fry-up.

The farm provides much of the food here, so food miles turn to food metres. Across the few days, we often see chefs harvesting herbs, rhubarb and other greens from the kitchen garden. Come evening, dinner is four courses, made up from the farm's bounty that day, so there's no lengthy menu to ponder. We start with sourdough and cultured butter peppered with bronzed fennel and spring tarragon from the garden, plus snacks – light and crispy truffle crackers with goat's cheese and a warming little cup of intense mushroom veloute, drizzled with parsley oil.

Then comes free-dived scallops that are softly cooked with cubes of smoked eel and thin tart slices of Granny Smith apple. It's followed by a decadent dish: a deliciously juicy hunk of pinky shorthorn beef fillet, with heritage carrot and creamy pomme puree. The finale is a little chocolate ganache with salted caramel – divine. To mix things up, you can also have dinner in your suite, or have meal kits delivered with instructions from the chefs.



> *I’m staying in the Orchard room – no guesses for what it overlooks… one of my favourite things is the lack of TV. Instead, it’s all about the view*

The following night, we head 40 minutes south to the 16th century Millbrook pub, also owned by Caitlin’s family. It’s right in the centre of the village of South Pool near Kingsbridge and is loved by locals, many of whom are sitting outside socialising catching the last of the sun. Its most vibrant with the high tides, bringing in plenty of boaters when we arrive from Salcombe and the other side of the water.

The food’s hearty and simple – we can’t resist and have more Rare & Pasture charcuterie, along with cauliflower and Devon Blue cheese soup, the best cottage pie I’ve ever had and spinach and ricotta ravioli. Plenty of the ingredients come from Fowlescombe farm too.

Back at the farm, there’s ten suites that have been reconfigured by local stonemasons using the farm’s quarry. These range from the original farmhouse, outbuildings and some in the stables, where I find my room. I’m staying in the Orchard room – no guesses for what it overlooks. Inside the spacious suite, one of my favourite things is the lack of TV. Instead, it’s all about the view, with two huge floor to ceiling windows framing the blossoming apple orchard outside, along with a flock of rather quiet chickens.

With its original high vaulted ceilings, abstract art and neutral tones, materials and shapes, it feels bright and calming. There’s a sofa and armchair seating area, a cleverly designed hidden kitchenette behind pocket doors that looks like a wardrobe when closed, and a luxurious bathroom. Outside, the private gravelled sun-trap terrace has a fire pit, plus table and chairs and it is perfect for an aperitif.

Each day, the itinerary of activities is listed in the notice board, which feels like a cross between a camp and a sweet village hall. Other activities – that are less bracing than my sea dip – include bread making, flower arranging and pressing with Shelley using fresh blooms from the garden that go in each suites and in the dining space, yoga (either inside

IMAGES © MATTHEW HAGUE

or outside, weather depending), gin botanical collecting, feeding the chickens and Friday night board games.

Keen to see more of the heart of Fowlescombe, I join one of the farm team who are leading today's farm tour. If needs be, there's wellies to borrow too, but not the fancy ones, as we're told this is a working farm.

First we head to see the Manx Loaghtan sheep with their almost golden brown hued fleeces, which is the largest Manx flock in the UK. Their wool is sent to a local natural mattress maker, Naturalmat, which of course supplies all of the suites.

On the way we pass the ruins of the estate's original mansion, which dates back to 1537. "When we took the farm over around ten years ago, the building wasn't even visible," Caitlin explains. It's taken the team a few years to clear the dense vegetation that covered it entirely to get it where it is now. "We're going to leave it there, as we think the ivy is now actually holding up the building, and any further trimming could cause the structure to crumble," she adds. It's Grade II listed and its gothic exterior is thought to have inspired author Sir Arthur Conan Doyal's portrayal of Baskerville Hall in The Hound of the Baskervilles novel.

We meet rusty-coloured Tamworth pigs in the woodlands, along with some crossed with black Barkshire pigs that come trotting up to the corrugated gate to greet us, scratching their backs on the fencing and gleefully rolling around. On the rest of the farm we see the English Longhorn cows, a few little adorable lambs that need to be hand-reared, and the group favourite, the cheeky goats with their gorgeous white and brown coats. Over just two days, I've slowed down, appreciated the surroundings and the seasons, plus, I've not watched TV – it's been a perfect slice of farm life. ◆

→ *Doubles from £410 per night include breakfast, dinner, snacks and activities; fowlescombe.com*

WHERE *happiness is a place*

British Travel Journal checks into chic Sussex seaside hotel The Gallivant, where its brand-new restaurant, Harry's, is already making waves

Text by Sophie Farrah

Like an overexcited dog desperate for a walk, I leapt out of my hot car, scrambled over the sand dunes, and emerged onto a beach so huge that my eyes could barely take it all in. I looked up and down the big, beautiful, sweeping stretch of golden sand, with its gentle blue waves and a vast horizon as far as the eye can see. No wonder it's known as 'Camber-fornia'…

As you may have already deduced from this nickname, I am not in Cali but Camber – a small village on the charming East Sussex coastline that's home to one of the most beautiful beaches in the country, Camber Sands. Running alongside this stunning three-mile-long stretch of soft, buttery beach is a series of undulating and irresistibly romantic sand dunes, and tucked just behind them sits The Gallivant.

Husband and wife team Harry and Sigrid Cragoe, an entrepreneur and interior stylist respectively, bought The Gallivant in 2010 and have since transformed it into a beautifully designed beachside retreat that offers laid-back luxury inspired by its beachside location. Formerly a motel, this adult's only, dog-friendly hideaway offers a nostalgic hint of its former life: it sits on the coastal road and is spread across a single storey L-shaped building, surrounded by speckled shingle and beautifully kept coastal gardens. Stepping over the succulent framed threshold and into the friendly reception area, I felt immediately feel at home – a

cocoon-like bar, comfy snug, airy dining room and pretty terrace make up the entirety of the hotel's chicly decorated communal spaces; it's small but perfectly formed, and feels cosy, intimate and oh-so inviting.

There are 20 bedrooms of varying sizes: some of which are accessed from the outside, motel-style. I checked into a beautiful Luxury Garden Room, furnished with an enormous handmade bed and a roll-top bath which can either form part of the bedroom or be cleverly concealed via sliding doors. Bookshelves are carefully – but not too carefully – decorated with trinkets and vintage novels; calming coastal hues and bold patterns blend pleasingly with bright pops of colour and framed vintage bathing costumes, whilst an undulating blue headboard evokes the rolling waves outside. Birdsong floated in on a warm summer breeze via a set of French doors, which open out on to a small private terrace surrounded by shingle paths and tropical plants. I felt as though I'd arrived in The Hamptons.

Thoughtful touches include a glass lantern for romantic evenings al fresco, blankets for the beach, and a water bottle embossed with your room name, which can be filled up via handy taps at the bar. A personalised printed itinerary informs me that 'English Wine at Five' is about to unfold, so I canter over to the candlelit bar and sink into a sofa in the cleverly designed 'snug' area, which is filled with books, games, squishy sofas and nostalgic nods. It's stylish yet homely and deeply comfortable – I could have spent my entire stay here and been happy.

'English Wine at Five' makes the most of the hotel's extensive wine list by offering guests a different English wine to try each day – when I visited it was a delicious Pinot Gris from Artelium in East Sussex. This is just one of the many perks that The Gallivant offers its guests; there's also an oyster happy hour and 'Raclette Fridays' to enjoy, but with the sun shining and the beach so close by I opted for 'Drinks in the Dunes'. I realised that nothing is too much trouble for welcoming hotel manager Conor Sheehan and his friendly team, as knowledgeable bartender Jonathan promptly mixed and muddled a couple of cocktails and packed them up for me 'to go'.

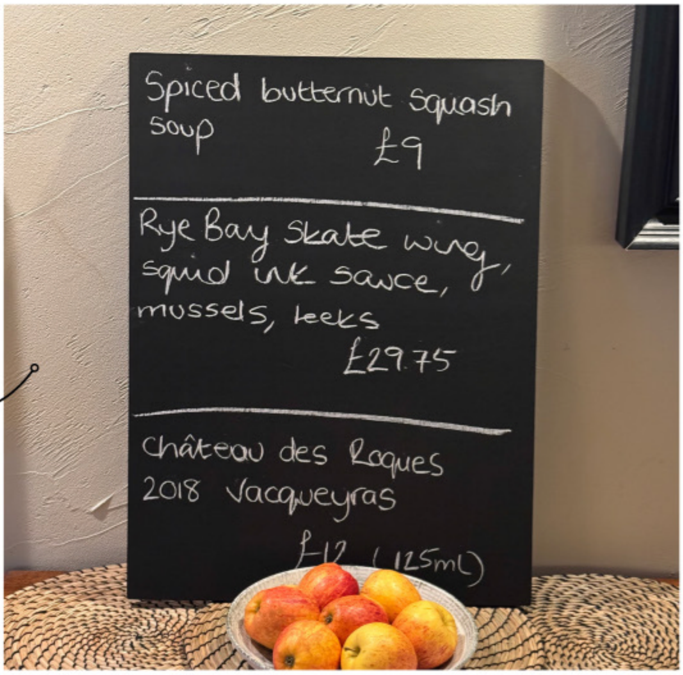
the Gallivant
CAMBER SANDS

As an Instagrammable golden hour unfolded, I hopped across the road and on to the golden sand where I rolled out one the hotel's cosy blankets amongst the swaying grasses perched above the beach. In my smart Gallivant-branded tote bag from the bar, I discovered glasses, ice and even a garnish, plus a cocktail-sized cool bottle filled with an excellent Old Fashioned, which I sipped as the sun set over the dunes. The Gallivant's motto is 'happiness is a place', and in that moment I felt as though I might just have found it…

Later that evening, I headed for the hotel's new restaurant, Harry's, which launched earlier this year. At the helm is Matthew Harris, who was the head chef of acclaimed London restaurant Bibendum for nearly 20 years. In Camber, his hearty, homely menu celebrates the best of seasonal British produce and is influenced by his classical French training. I spy a blackboard of specials, scribbled with the likes of locally landed fish, côte de boeuf, and tarte fine pommes flambée, and felt immediately optimistic.

The chic, white-washed dining room has a relaxed beachy feel, but a few luxurious touches give it a sense of 'special'; comfy rattan chairs are elevated by crisp white table linen; colourful vintage bathing attire sits alongside large leafy plants, and double doors open out on the hotel's pretty terrace, letting in natural light and lovely views. In the centre of the space sits a large circular table adorned with hanging plants and tempting bottles of golden nectar-esque digestifs, all illuminated by flickering candlelight.

A fresh and flavoursome plate of local crab arrived first, mixed with crunchy fennel, sweet blood orange and a silky courchamps dressing (a mouthwatering medley of brown crab meat, fresh herbs and aniseed liqueur) – it was a sophisticated and deeply satisfying taste of the seaside. Next, a skilfully cooked chunk of hake, with a glistening pile of salty monk's beard, creamy pine nuts, and a beautiful sauce maltaise, made by adding the sweet juice of blood oranges to a very good hollandaise. Laced with Mediterranean



Spiced butternut squash soup £9

Rye Bay skate wing, squid ink sauce, mussels, leeks £29.75

Château des Roques 2018 Vacqueyras £12 (125ml)

> *I mean, where else can you enjoy the spoils of an expertly mixed cocktail picnic as the sun sets over the sand dunes?*

flavour, it was a precise and beautifully balanced dish that suits its beachside setting perfectly. I also tried the special – a heavenly plate of Rye Bay skate wing doused in a rich, sticky, salty squid ink sauce peppered with plump mussels and sweet leeks. I wanted to lick the plate clean.

The uncomplicated joy of homemade vanilla ice cream and a pot of warm chocolate sauce should never be underestimated and Harry's version, which comes with an additional flourish of crunchy praline, was nothing short of perfect. A hefty slice of St Emilion au chocolat – a luxurious dessert made by soaking crushed amaretti biscuits in sherry and then topping them with a rich chocolate cream – was just as decadent as it sounds, its delectable richness offset by a dollop of good crème fraîche. Much like the meal, the service throughout was five star.

Before bed, I couldn't resist one last stroll along that magnificent beach. The sheer expanse of sky is breathtaking by day, and at night it looked like a thick black blanket of velvet studded with an incomprehensible amount of twinkling diamonds. Combined with the sound of lapping waves, it was positively dreamlike.

Back in the serenity of my chic hotel room, I discovered a tray on the bed. On it, a small tea light lantern flickered alongside mugs, a flask of hot water, and bags of herbal tea ready to be brewed. The Gallivant call this the 'We Have Drift Off' tray, and they aren't wrong. After a cup of 'sleepy' infusion, I quickly nodded off.

The following morning began with an expertly led, gently invigorating yoga class in the hotel's light-filled, wood-clad studio, with the unmistakable seaside soundtrack of seagull song adding to the experience. There are daily yoga sessions on offer to guests – sometimes on the beach if the weather allows – as well as other regular wellness offerings such as sound baths and breathwork sessions. Maybe it was because I was feeling extra zen after my Vinyasa flow, but breakfast was one of the best I've had at any hotel. You'll find no full English or eggs royale on The Gallivant's menu; instead, a continental-inspired tray is brought to your table, neatly arranged with fresh, flavoursome delights such as coconut-laced granola, creamy local yogurt and cheese, a zingy shot of fresh turmeric and ginger, and a plate of thinly sliced cucumber, tomato and radish. A small white paper bag is also provided so that you can pack up any leftover bits for the beach. Elsewhere, the tempting digestifs have been replaced with an array of breads, pickles, homemade jams and more, plus a steaming egg boiler and a choice of charming vintage egg cups. There's also a so-called 'recovery station', laden with all the ingredients required to mix up a mean Bloody (or Virgin) Mary, should one have perhaps overindulged the night before...

Soon the sun was high and the sea was calling, so I swung by reception where a handy noticeboard outlines the tide times for the day. It's also stocked with everything you might need for a day at the beach, from deck chairs and sun hats to wellies and raincoats, just in case. I skipped over the dunes and straight into the sea for a refreshing dip, before drying off in the sunshine. Bliss.

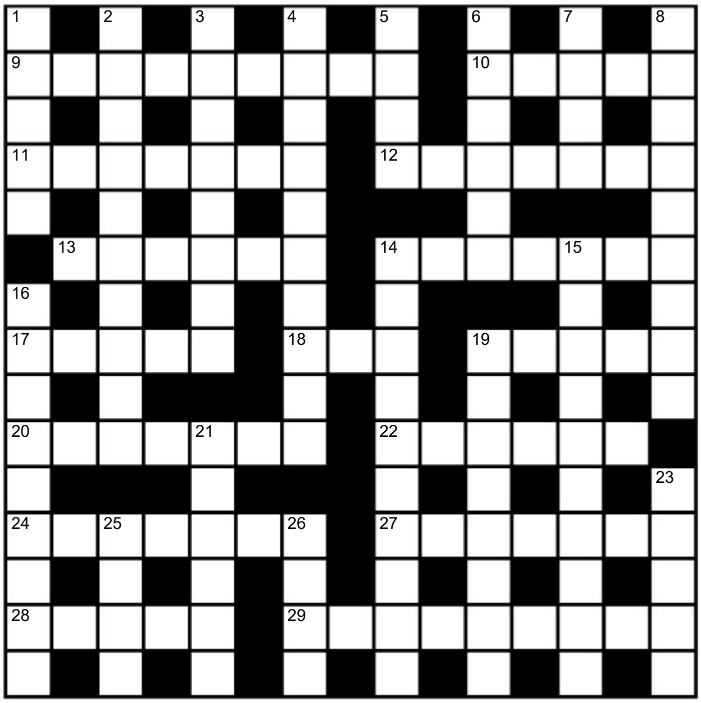
I could have spent all day lying on Camber's magnificent sands, but I also was keen to explore. My first stop was the medieval town of Rye (less than a ten minute drive from The Gallivant) where I pottered around the historic winding streets and gorgeous independent shops. I then headed to Dungeness, just a 15 minute drive away, to admire the strange shingle landscape, eclectic houses and the little vintage steam train which runs along the beach.

There are also several first-rate vineyards in the area, such as Oxney, Tillingham and Gusbourne, but in true British style the rain clouds rolled in. I could have continued my sightseeing, but secretly I was rather pleased to return guilt-free to The Gallivant's cosy sitting room for cake at 4pm (yet another tasty perk for guests).

Tempted as I was to stick around for more English wine at 5pm, soon it was time to hit the road. On the drive home, with sun-kissed skin and sand still between my toes, I felt as though I'd spent the weekend abroad. Sunshine or not, The Gallivant caters for all eventualities, and offers a beautiful, beachy sense of laid-back style and a thoughtfully curated experience that feels both luxurious and unique. I mean, where else can you enjoy the spoils of an expertly mixed cocktail picnic as the sun sets over the sand dunes? If you're looking for special seaside staycation spot this summer, Camber-fornia is calling. ◆

→ *Rooms at The Gallivant start at £165 per room per night based on two guests sharing; thegallivant.co.uk*

CROSSWORD COMPETITION



Clues & Reviews

Enjoy our crossword puzzle about some of the places we *love* and have featured in this edition!

ACROSS

1 Everybody (3,3,3)
10 Firth of Forth isle named after feathers (5)
11 Decorative knotting (7)
12 Former home of the Clan MacIntyre, near Loch Etive (4,3)
13 A good South Coast restaurant to go Gallivanting in? (6)
14 Beef or lamb, for example (3,4)
17 More hands-on version of football in the Midlands (5)
18 Only one of this animal at Welsh cabin spot (3)
19 Sound of 18 Across (5)
20 Old form of illumination (3,4)
22 Berkshire town disliked by Sir John Betjeman (6)
24 Duty-bound (7)
27 Blow up (7)
28 Skye inn sounds German (5)
29 One who's in until others who aren't in get him out (9)

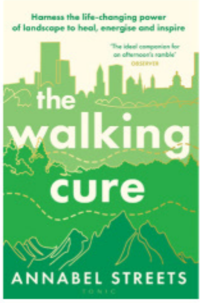
DOWN

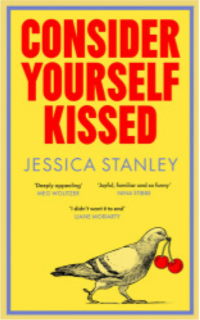
1 Dorset farm retreat (5)
2 Profound transformations (3,7)
3 With prejudice (8)
4 Essential hikers' accessories (10)
5 Green marker? (4)
6 Was this part of Crawley the home of an old yodeller? (6)
7 Heavenly Cornish project (4)
8 Modern version of Orpheus and Eurydice (9)
14 It cooks meat to a turn (10)
15 Lay it on thick (10)
16 With Rastrick, possessor of a notable brass band (9)
19 Resembling the parish lantern (8)
21 Sartorial problem sometimes experienced by politicians at public meetings (6)
23 The state of these Harriers after over-indulgence in Hambledon? (5)
25 Lascivious look (4)
26 Eat at the Drunken ---, Ambleside (4)

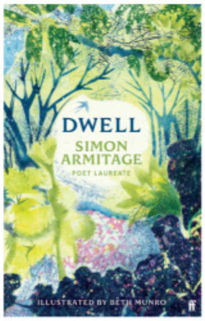
For a chance to win a prize send a picture of your completed crossword, or email a list of the answers; crossword@britishtraveljournal.com

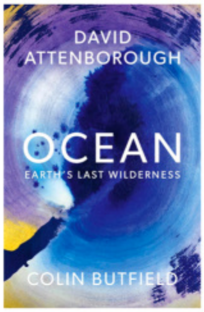
Just-released titles to take with you this summer

Text by Amy Bonifas


Harness the life-changing power of landscape to heal, energise and inspire
the walking cure
ANNABEL STREETS
TONIC







1. FOR LOCAL ADVENTURERS

***The Walking Cure* by Annabel Streets (Bloomsbury Tonic, £14.99)**

Celebrating the power and joy of walking, Streets explains the curative benefits and matches 20 rural and urban walks to different moods, encouraging us to take the path less travelled more often. Reading will help to spark creativity and cultivate healing when you need it.

2. FOR ROMANTICS

***Consider Yourself Kissed* by Jessica Stanley (Penguin, £11)**

Hailed as the next Normal People, this modern romantic saga is the perfect holiday read. Set against the backdrop of Brexit and Covid, Adam and Coralie's romance takes centre stage, but the messiness of love, complications of family life and quiet losses are the real crux of the story.

3. FOR NATURE LOVERS

***Dwell* by Simon Armitage (Faber & Faber, £10)**

Poet Laureate Armitage was inspired by the Lost Gardens of Heligan in Cornwall when writing this beautiful collection. It's full of magical landscapes, from woodlands to meadows and natural 'jungles', home to an array of wildlife. He also warns of the fragility of these spaces and reminds us how precious these dwellings are for us and local animals.

4. FOR ECO ACTIVISTS

***Ocean: Earth's Last Wilderness* by David Attenborough (John Murray Publishers, £28)**

Almost a century in the making, David Attenborough has filmed in every ocean habitat on planet Earth. Now, he shares his story about the ocean that shapes our land and its fragility, diving into eight unique areas, from kelp forests to mangroves and coral reefs and discovering wondrous creatures from bioluminescent jellyfish to vampire squid.

ANSWERS TO OUR SPRING 2025 CROSSWORD

Across: 1 Scilly, 4 Falmouth, 10 Peanut oil, 11 Trail, 12 Animist, 13 Ardfern, 14 Osip, 15 Road trips, 18 By the book, 20 Eden, 23 Papayas, 25 Dream up, 26 Naira, 27 Escalated, 28 Entrusts, 29 Usurps. **Down:** 1 Sopranos, 2 Inability, 3 Laurie, 5 All hands on deck, 6 Matador, 7 Usage, 8 Helena, 9 Wootton bassett, 16 Pedometer, 17 In spades, 19 Hey palu, 21 Spence, 22 Mellis, 24 Point.

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